NATION

India declares 2025 as year of defence reforms

≫ Page: 4 ≪

BUSINESS

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≫ Page: 7 ≪

SPORTS

Gambhir's handling of India's transition raises eyebrows

≫ Page: 8 ≪

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China's dam will dry up Brahmaputra: Assam CM

Arunachal has also written to Centre about ecological harm

GUWAHATI, 1 JAN

The proposed construction of the world's largest dam by China on Brahmaputra in Tibet will damage the ecosystem of the river in Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

During an interaction with journalists here, Sarma said the Centre has communicated to China the dangers posed by the dam in the lower reaches of the river.

''The dam will pose a big problem for us as the riverbed will dry up and the entire river system will become fragile. We have already raised the matter with the Centre'', he said.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu has also written to the Centre about the matter, Sarma added.

> **The dam will pose a big problem for us as the riverbed will dry up and the entire river system will become fragile. We have already raised the matter with the Centre**
>
> -Himanta Biswa Sarma, Assam CM

Last week, China approved the construction of the world's largest dam, stated to be the planet's biggest infra project, on the Brahmaputra river in Tibet close to the Indian border, raising concerns in India and Bangladesh. The hydropower project will be built in the lower reaches of the Yarlung Zangbo river, the Tibetan name for the Brahmaputra.

The dam will be built at a huge gorge in the Himalayan reaches where the Brahmaputra river makes a huge U-turn to flow into Arunachal Pradesh and then to Bangladesh, an official release had said.

Additionally, he said that there were some debatable issues like the cadastral survey of land in 'Char' (riverine) areas and discussions were being held with the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) for implementing the Justice (Retd) Biplab Sarma committee's recommendations on Clause 6 of the Assam Accord to protect the interests of the state's indigenous population.

Most recommendations of the committee will be implemented by the state government by April, he said during an interaction with journalists here. He said the relationship between the different communities has improved considerably over the years and most of the issues would be resolved without any debate. *—PTI*

16L GIRLS DROPPED OUT

School enrolments down by 37 lakh

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Enrolment in schools across India fell by 37 lakh in 2023–24 as compared to the previous year, the Ministry of Education's data showed.

The data was collated by the Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+), a platform maintained by the education ministry to collate school education data from across the country.

The figures for 2023–24 stood at 24.80 crore while the number of enrolled students in 2022–23 was 25.17 crore. The number of girl students dropped by 16 lakh during the period under review, while the number of boy students fell by 21 lakh.

The representation of minorities in total enrolment stood at around 20 per cent. Of this, 79.6 per cent were Muslims, 10 per cent Christians, 6.9 per cent Sikhs, 2.2 per cent Buddhists,

1.3 per cent Jains and 0.1 per cent Parsis.

At the national level, 26.9 per cent students registered in UDISE+ were from the general category, 18 per cent from Scheduled Caste, 9.9 per cent from Scheduled Tribe and 45.2 per cent from the Other Backward Class category.

UDISE+ 2023–24 attempted to collect student-wise data along with their Aadhaar numbers on voluntary basis. More than 19.7 crore students have provided Aadhaar details. *—PTI*

Govt hikes fertiliser subsidy, crop insurance

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said the government's first decision in the New Year is dedicated to farmers, as the Union Cabinet headed by him enhanced allocation to crop insurance scheme and raised subsidy to a key fertiliser.

He said on X, "(Govt's) first decision of the New Near is dedicated to crores of farmer brothers and sisters of our country. We have approved increasing the allocation for crop insurance scheme. This will provide more security to farmers' crops and will also mitigate their concerns about any damage."

The Cabinet's decision on extending the one-time special package on Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) will increase affordability of the fertiliser, he said.

The Cabinet approved continuation of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana and Restructured Weather Based Crop Insurance Scheme till 2025–26 with an overall outlay of Rs 69,515.71 crore for 2021–22 to 2025–26. The decision will help in risk coverage of crops from non-preventable natural calamities for farmers across the country till 2025–26, a statement said.

It also approved the proposal of the Department of Fertilizers for extension of One-time Special Package on DAP beyond the NBS subsidy at Rs 3,500 per MT from Wednesday till further orders. The tentative budgetary requirement for this would be approximately up to Rs 3,850 crore, the statement said. *—PTI*

NEW YEAR BUMPER MADNESS

Tourists are stuck in a traffic jam as they leave resorts after the New Year celebrations in Chikkamagaluru on Wednesday. Known for its hills and lush greenery, Chikkamagaluru is a hot favourite among visitors during this time of the year **PHOTO:PTI**

2024 INDIA'S WARMEST SINCE 1901: IMD

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

2024 was the warmest year in India since 1901, with the average minimum temperature settling 0.90 degrees Celsius above the long-period average, the IMD said on Wednesday.

The annual mean temperature in 2024 was 25.75 degrees Celsius, 0.65 degrees above the long-period average.

The average maximum temperature stood at 31.25 degrees Celsius, 0.20 degrees above normal. The average minimum temperature was 20.24 degrees Celsius, 0.90 degrees above normal, according to India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.

The year 2024 surpassed 2016, which had recorded a mean land surface air temperature 0.54 degrees Celsius above normal, making it the warmest year since 1901.

The average minimum temperature was the highest on record for July, August, September and October, and the second highest for February, the IMD chief said.

European climate agency Copernicus reports that 2024 likely ended as the warmest year globally and the first with average temperatures 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial (1850–1900) levels. *—PTI*

CM: No proof against Priyank in contractor's death

BENGALURU, 1 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said there was no evidence against Minister Priyank Kharge in the civil contractor suicide case. He said the CID has been assigned to probe the suicide case, and its report is awaited. Speaking to reporters here Siddaramaiah said, "His (Priyank Kharge's) name is not there. He has no role in it. There is no evidence against him. Still, he is being asked to resign. Why should he resign?" BJP has mounted pressure on the Congress government and is demanding Priyank's resignation in connection with the suicide of a civil contractor Sachin Panchal in Bidar district. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Pak asked to expedite Indian prisoners' release

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

India on Wednesday urged Pakistan to expedite the release and repatriation of 183 Indian fishermen and civilian prisoners in view of completion of their jail terms. In addition, Pakistan has been asked to provide immediate consular access to the 18 civilian prisoners and fishermen in their custody, who are believed to be Indian, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. India made the request in the context of the exchange of lists of civilian prisoners and fishermen by both the countries as part of a practice to do so on 1 January and 1 July every calendar year under the framework of a 2008 pact. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 3

10 run over during NY revelry in US

NEW ORLEANS, 1 JAN

A driver rammed a vehicle into a crowd of New Orleans revellers early on New Year's Day, killing 10 people and injuring 35 others in what the FBI is investigating as an "act of terrorism".

The driver was killed in a firefight with police following the attack around 3.15 am Wednesday along Bourbon Street in the city's bustling French Quarter, the FBI said.

Investigators were combing the French Quarter for potential explosive devices, a law enforcement official told AP.

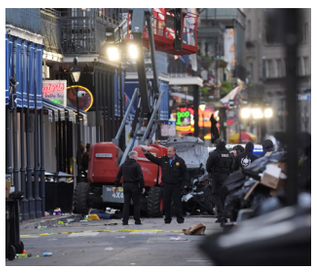


PHOTO: PTI

FBI Assistant Special Agent in Charge Alethea Duncan also said officials were investigating at least one suspected improvised explosive device at the scene.

At a news conference, New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell described the killings as a "terrorist attack" and the city's police chief said the act was clearly intentional.

New Orleans Police Commissioner Anne Kirkpatrick said the driver was "hell-bent on creating the carnage and the damage that he did."

"It was very intentional behaviour. This man was trying to run over as many people as he could," Kirkpatrick said.

After the vehicle stopped, the driver emerged and opened fire on responding officers, police said. Officers returned fire, killing the driver, police said. *—PTI*

Vijayan defends 'Sanatan Dharma' remark amid flak

T'PURAM, 1 JAN

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Wednesday reaffirmed his statement cautioning against "organised efforts" to portray sage and social reformer Sree Narayana Guru as a proponent of Sanatan Dharma.

"I stand by what I have stated about Sanatan Dharma," Vijayan told a press conference here while reacting to a query about the mounting criticism from the BJP over his statement made during the Sivagiri pilgrimage conference held on Tuesday.

Inaugurating the conference in Sivagiri, Vijayan claimed that the Guru, who advocated "one caste, one religion and one God for people" had neither been a spokesperson nor a practitioner of the Sanatan Dharma but had reconstructed it and proclaimed a Dharma suited to the new age. Reacting to Vijayan's statement, BJP had alleged that the chief minister insulted Sanatana Dharma and followers of Sree Narayana Guru through his remarks in the holy land of Sivagiri. *—PTI*

IN RAJASTHAN

Borewell kills: Girl dies after 10-day rescue op

JAIPUR, 1 JAN

A three-year-old girl, who fell into a 150-foot-deep borewell in Rajasthan's Kotputli-Behror district, was brought out in an unconscious state on Wednesday after a 10-day rescue operation carried out by NDRF and SDRF teams and rushed to hospital, officials said.

However, the girl, Chetna, was declared dead by doctors at the hospital, they said.

NDRF team in-charge Yogesh Meena said that when the girl was taken out, there was no movement in her body.

Chetna was immediately taken to Kotputli's BDM hospital by ambulance where a team of doctors declared her dead, the officials said.

The child had fallen into the borewell on December 23 while playing in the agriculture farm of her father in Badiyali Dhani under the Sarund police station area.

The girl, Chetna, was declared dead by doctors at the hospital **PHOTO: PTI**

Initially, efforts were made to pull the girl out of the borewell with the help of a ring but all attempts failed. Then a piling machine was brought to the spot and a parallel pit was dug.

Till Monday, the rescue teams of NDRF and SDRF were hopeful of completing the operation and reaching the girl, but they could not succeed in saving the child as layers of sedimentary rock compounded the drilling work, the officials said.

The family members had earlier accused the district administration of being negligent.

Around two weeks back, a five-year-old boy fell into a borewell in Dausa district where the rescue operation lasted for more than 55 hours.

However, the boy lost the battle for life by the time he was taken out. *—PTI*

Caste bias: Centre amends prison rules

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

PHOTO: PTI

The Union Home Ministry has amended the prison manual rules to check discrimination and classification of inmates in jails on the basis of their castes.

In a communication to chief secretaries of all states and Union territories, the Union Home Ministry said to address the issue of any caste-based discrimination of prisoners, Model Prison Manual, 2016 and the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023 have been amended.

The changes have been made in the wake of the 3 October-order of the Supreme Court on caste-based discrimination of prisoners.

According to the new addition in the manual, the prison authorities will have to strictly ensure that there is no discrimination, classification, segregation of prisoners on the basis of their caste. Changes have also been made in the Miscellaneous of the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023.

"Manual scavenging or hazardous cleaning of a sewer or a septic tank inside a prison shall not be permitted," it said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Leopard search ops at Mysuru Infosys enters 2nd day

MYSURU, 1 JAN

Efforts to trace the elusive leopard spotted inside the Infosys campus in Mysuru's Hebbal industrial area have remained futile for a second consecutive day. Neither the staff nor CCTV footage has provided any sightings of the animal. The leopard was seen in the early hours of Tuesday, prompting the Forest Department to launch a massive search operation. The department deployed thermal drone cameras, increased foot patrols, and installed camera traps in strategic locations. Walk-in cages were also set up, and veterinarians were stationed on-site. Despite these measures, officials suggest the leopard might have escaped from the campus. Management has advised all employees and 4,000 trainees to stay indoors and given. *—Salar News*

No evidence against Priyank, says CM

CID to probe civil contractor's suicide case

BENGALURU, 1 JAN

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said there was no evidence against Priyank Kharge in the civil contractor suicide case.

He said the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) has been assigned to probe the suicide case, and its report is awaited.

Speaking to reporters here Siddaramaiah said, "His (Priyank Kharge's) name is not there. He has no role in it. There is no evidence against him. Still, he is being asked to resign. Why should he resign?"

The BJP has mounted pressure on the Congress government and is demanding Priyank's resignation in connection with the suicide of a civil contractor Sachin Panchal in Bidar district.

In his suicide note, Panchal alleged that Raju Kapanur pestered him for rupees one crore, a charge which the latter has denied. The BJP

Siddaramaiah PHOTO: PTI

alleged that Kapanur is Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Kharge's close aide.

When pointed out that KS Eshwarappa resigned as minister in the BJP government after a contractor said the minister was demanding 40 per cent commission, Siddaramaiah said the suicide note then had Eshwarappa's name.

"Is Priyank Kharge's name mentioned in the suicide note? His name is not mentioned anywhere. The Minister has said that he is ready for any inquiry," the Chief Minister said.

He added that based on a complaint, the matter has been handed over to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), whose report is awaited.

The Chief Minister said when the BJP was in power, they did not hand over a single case to the CBI. What moral rights the BJP has to ask for it now? he asked.

On MLC C T Ravi episode who is accused of using derogatory words against the Karnataka Woman and Child Development Minister Laxmi Hebbalkar in the Legislative Council on 19 December, Siddaramaiah said that the case has also been handed over to the CID.

"There are charges that he has spoken something disparaging and demeaning. Based on the allegation, the CID has registered an FIR against CT Ravi. The forensic report has to come to ascertain whether he had uttered it or not," he added. *—PTI*

Suicide note has Priyank's name: BJP

BJP says there is threat to contractor's family

BENGALURU, 1 JAN

BJP leader Chalavadi Narayanaswamy on Wednesday charged that Minister "Priyank Kharge's name is found at three places" in the suicide note written by contractor Sachin Panchal but Chief Minister Siddaramaiah defended the minister for want of evidence.

Narayanaswamy, Leader of Opposition in the Karnataka Legislative Council, said the Chief Minister has been saying that Kharge's name is not mentioned in the suicide note written by contractor Sachin Panchal, which was wrong.

"Minister Priyank's name is mentioned at three places in the seven-page suicide note. You demand documents. Here is the one. What else should we produce?" Narayanaswamy told reporters here.

Chief Minister said there was no document to prove and hence the question of removing Priyank Kharge

Narayanaswamy PHOTO: PTI

would not arise, Narayanaswamy noted.

"We know that you don't have the guts to remove him because the Minister's father Mallikarjun Kharge is the Congress President. If you touch Priyank then he would uproot you. You are afraid of losing power. You are glued to your chief ministerial position," the BJP leader alleged.

He said everyone was initially doubting the seven-page suicide note written by Panchal but now the FSL report has confirmed that the letter was written by the civil contractor himself.

It is confirmed that this suicide note is not fake but the original one, Narayanaswamy said adding that the government has to answer to Panchal's suicide.

BJP leader said there is a threat to Panchal's family and, especially five sisters of Panchal. He also alleged that Panchal suicide case has a honey trap angle too. He reiterated BJP's demand for a CBI probe in the case.

Panchal died by suicide by lying before a moving train in Bidar district. In his suicide note, he alleged that Raju Kapanur pestered him for rupees one crore, a charge which Kapanur has denied.

Panchal also alleged that Kapanur hired contract killers to eliminate BJP MLA Basavaraj Mattimud and, two other top BJP leaders in Kalaburagi and a Lingayat pontiff. BJP alleged that Kapanur is Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyank Kharge's close aide. *—PTI*

Congress sent a Wadiyar to Parl 4 times: KPCC

MYSURU, 1 JAN

Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee Spokesperson M Lakshaman on Wednesday hit back at BJP's Mysuru MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar for accusing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah of targeting the Mysuru royal family. Lakshaman said his party has always respected the royal family and pointed out that Srikantadutta Narasimharaja Wadiyar represented constituency four times in the Parliament on Congress ticket. The KPCC Spokesperson urged Yaduveer to focus on the development of his constituency instead of making allegations against the Chief Minister and the Congress. Lakshaman said the Congress government's decision to naming a stretch of KRS road after Siddaramaiah is firm. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: X

Cancer-free Shivanna to return with 'more energy'

BENGALURU, 1 JAN

Actor Shivarajkumar, popularly known as Shivanna, who is being treated for cancer at Miami Cancer Institute in Florida, United States of America, said on Wednesday he's been declared cancer-free by his doctors. He shared a video of him and his wife, Geetha Shivarajkumar, on his X account, in which both of them assured his fans and well-wishers that all is fine. Shivanna said he will come back, most probably in March, with double the energy and will sing, dance, and fight in many more films. Geetha said pathology reports post the surgery have come negative after which the doctors have officially declared Shivanna as cancer-free. *—Salar News*

Sankonatti GP Chief loses confidence vote

BELAGAVI, 1 JAN

Santosh Kakamari, a supporter of Ramesh Jarkiholi and president of Sankonatti gram panchayat in Athani taluk lost his position following a confidence vote on 31 December. Sankonatti gram panchayat is the largest in the State with 56 members. While 14 members who pledged support to Jarkiholi and Kumatolli stayed off from the voting, the remaining 42 voted in favour of the No Confidence Motion. Belagavi divisonal commissioner is expected to announce the polls for new president of Sankonatti soon. *—Salar News*

Karnataka rings in peaceful New Year: HM

BENGALURU, 1 JAN

Home Minister G Parameshwara on Wednesday said the New Year celebrations in Bengaluru and across the State concluded peacefully without any untoward incidents.

Commending the police department for efficiently managing the situation, he expressed his gratitude to the public for cooperating with authorities in maintaining law and order.

"Lakhs of people and youth gathered for last night's New Year celebrations. The events remained peaceful, with no untoward incident reported for the first time in the state," Parameshwara said while conveying his New Year greetings.

"I thank and applaud the people, especially the youth in Bengaluru and other parts

People celebrate New Year on Brigade Road in Bengaluru on Tuesday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

of the state for being cautious and cooperating with the police... police have managed successfully without any incident," he added.

On the occasion of New Year, temples were crowded with people flocking to seek blessings. 28,127 vehicles were checked and the number of cases registered for drunk driving was 513. Koramangala, Brigade Road, Church Street and MG Road, especially, got very crowded as the night wore on. *—PTI*

DRUNK DRIVING KILLS 2 ON FIRST DAY OF 2025

MYSURU, 1 JAN

Two people died on the spot and another person was seriously injured after their car rammed into an electric pole near Kambaragundi on Kodasoge–Kandegala road in Chamarajanagar district on Wednesday morning. Jurisdictional Terakanambi police identified the deceased as HP Pratap Kumar, 28, and Kongalaiah, 46, and the injured person as Abhishekh. All three victims are residents of Kodasoge village in Gundlupet taluk. Pratapkumar was a power-man at Bommalapura CESC office. The incident took place while the trio was returning to Kodasoge after New Year celebrations. They were under the influence of alcohol. The electric pole was broken into three pieces from the impact of the collision, police said. Prathap Kumar and Kongalaiah, who were sitting on the front seat, died on the spot, while Abhishekh sustained severe injuries. He was rushed to Chamarajanagar district hospital. The bodies of the duo were handed over to the relatives after conducting autopsy.

Based on the complaint filed by Mayura, a junior engineer at Bommalapura CESC, Terakanambi police have registered a case and the investigation is underway. *—Salar News*

FIRST PRAYER OF 2025

Devotees offer prayers at Bull Temple on the first day of the New Year at Basavanagudi in Bengaluru on Wednesday; People light candles at Infant Jesus Church at Viveknagar in Bengaluru PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

Man sentenced to death for killing his 3 children

MANGALURU, 1 JAN

The Third Additional District and Sessions Court in Mangaluru court has convicted and sentenced to death a man for allegedly killing his three children and attempting to kill his wife by pushing them into a well.

Justice Sandhya handed the sentence to Hitesh Shettigar on 31 December.

According to police, the incident occurred on 23 June, 2022, in Padmanoor village. The accused allegedly pushed his three children into a well, leading to their death. He also pushed his wife Lakshmi into the same well but she was rescued.

Investigations revealed that Shettigar was unemployed and frequently quarrelled with his wife. On the day of the incident, driven by resentment, he pushed all four of them into the well after his children arrived from school. When the woman screamed for help, a flower rescued her by entering the well.

The police also found that the eldest girl had tried to save herself by clinging on to a pipe installed in the well, but Shettigar cut the pipe with a knife, ensuring that she could not escape.

A case was registered at Mulki Police Station under the Indian Penal Code Sections 302 (murder) and 307 (attempt to murder). Prosecutor Mohan Kumar presented strong evidence during the trial.

The court concluded that the brutality of murder of the children and the attempt to kill their mother warranted the maximum punishment. *—PTI*

FATAL ACCIDENTS DOWN BY 1.26% IN BENGALURU

BENGALURU, 1 JAN

The Bengaluru Traffic Police on Wednesday said its efforts have led to a 1.26 per cent reduction in fatal accidents and a 1.90 per cent drop in deaths caused by mishaps in 2024 compared to the previous year.

Non-fatal accidents saw a sharper decline of 4.57 per cent, contributing to an overall 3.97 per cent reduction in total accidents compared to 2023, they said.

In 2024, Bengaluru reported 4,784 accident cases, out of which 871 were fatal and 3,913 were non-fatal. These incidents resulted in 893 fatalities and 4,052 injuries.

However, the data revealed a slight 3.34 per cent increase in self-accident cases –212 people lost their lives in 210 such cases.

"In 2024, concrete measures were taken to identify and rectify black spots in Bengaluru city, particularly those pertaining to pedestrians' accidents. The efforts paid off, and there has been a 23.17 per cent reduction in pedestrian deaths in 2024 compared to 2023," the police said. Police said 233 pedestrians died in accidents in 2024. The data showed that a total of 82,86,561 cases were registered for various traffic violations in 2024 and the total fine amount collected was Rs 80.90 crore. *—PTI*

FIR against BJP leaders for unlawful assembly

BENGALURU, 1 JAN

In an FIR has been registered against Chalavadi Narayanaswamy, the Leader of Opposition in Karnataka Legislative Council, BJP MLC CT Ravi and 11 other party functionaries on charges of unlawful assembly here, police said on Wednesday.

The BJP leaders on Tuesday staged a protest at the Race Course Road junction here demanding the resignation of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Minister Priyanka Kharge in connection with the suicide of a civil contractor in Bidar last week.

"No permission was sought for organising the protest and a case has been booked against the BJP party members on 31 December for unlawful assembly," a senior police officer said. The 26-year-old contractor, Sachin Monappa Panchal, had left behind a seven-page note in which he made allegations against a person who is said to be Kharge's aide.

An FIR was registered under sections 285 (Danger or obstruction in public way or line of navigation), 292 (Public nuisance) and 3(5) (common intention) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita at High Grounds police station. *—PTI*

125 UNIQUE DISHES

Avarebele mela: A celebration of hyacinth beans

PRIYANKA SAHARIA
BENGALURU, 1 JAN

Basavanagudi saw a large crowd as the avarebele mela returned for its 25th edition. Held at the National College Grounds in Basavanagudi, Bengaluru, this vibrant festival celebrates the versatility of hyacinth beans, locally known as Avarebele or Avarekalu.

The mela runs daily from 11 am to 11 pm until 5 January, offering an extraordinary culinary experience. Visitors can savour over 125 dishes, ranging from traditional South Indian favourites such as bonda, holige, vada, akki roti, and dosa to innovative creations like gulab jamun, pasta, pizza, and even ice cream—all infused with the unique flavour of Avarebele. With prices between Rs10 and Rs100, the mela ensures an affordable treat for all. 17-year-old Ansh

With the mela attracting over one lakh visitors each day, it continues to stand as a testament to the region's love for food and culture PHOTO: SALAR

who visited the Avarebele mela with his sister and friends said, "We all are here because it looked fun and different". Another visitor Namita said, "We tried holige, dosa, pakoda, and jalebi. My mother, daughter, and I—three generations—are enjoying this experience. The green jalebi was a surprise! Despite the bean blend, its original taste and crispiness remain intact." The festival's origins trace back to 2000 when Swathi KS, proprietor of Shree Vasavi Condiments, identified an issue with the short shelf life of peeled hyacinth beans. "The farmers who brought the beans to sell often discarded them by evening, as the peeled beans spoil quickly. My mother noticed this and began collecting the surplus beans from farmers, turning them into savoury items to extend their shelf life," Swathi said. The mela also serves to honour the farming community.

Swathi said she wants the whole of India and the world to know about Avarebele.

According to folklore, a 13th-century Hoysala king, Veera Ballala II, lost in a forest, was offered boiled beans and water by an old woman. In gratitude, he named the area Benda Kaalu Ooru, meaning "The City of Boiled Beans," which eventually became Bengaluru. With the mela attracting over one lakh visitors each day, it continues to stand as a testament to the region's love for food,and culture. *—Salar News*

BSP may contest all 70 seats in Delhi Assembly polls

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is likely to contest all 70 seats in the upcoming Assembly polls in Delhi, with the first list of candidates likely to be released by mid-January. A party official said the city has been divided into five zones and the process of finalising candidates in all the zones is underway. Talking to PTI, he said the Delhi Assembly polls, due in February, are both "interesting and challenging". He said coordinators have been assigned to each of the zones to oversee the candidate-selection process. The list of candidates is expected to be finalised by 15 January. BSP contested the all seats in the 2020 election but failed to win any. —*PTI*

UP Minister claims threat from STF over 'irregularities'

LUCKNOW, 1 JAN

Facing allegations of irregularities in the promotion of lecturers in his technical educa-tion department, Uttar Pradesh minister Ashish Patel on Wednesday alleged a threat to his life from the state police's Special Task Force (STF). He said that if any conspiracy or incident occurs during his fight for "social justice," the responsibility will rest solely with the STF. The controversy erupted after Pallavi Patel, an MLA from Sirathu representing the Samajwadi Party and a leader of the Apna Dal (Kameravadi), alleged irregularities in the appointments of department heads in the Technical Education Department. She accused officials of bypassing current service rules in favour of older ones to facilitate the appointments, terming it a scam. Meanwhile, Ashish Patel questioned why he alone is being blamed, pointing out that such allegations indicate a larger conspiracy.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Kerala MLA Uma's health improving, say doctors

KOCHI, 1 JAN

The health condition of Uma Thomas MLA, who suffered a 15-feet fall from the dais during a cultural event on 29 December, is improving and she is on the road to recovery, doctors said on Wednesday. Addressing reporters, Krishanunni, Medical Director of Renai Medicity, where she is being treated, said Thomas was now being given intermittent ventilator support only and otherwise she was breathing on her own. He said a combined medical board including government doctors had met on Tuesday evening and everyone was happy about the way the treatment was going. The patient is responding to treatment and has been able to recognise family members and doctors. She is also able to move her limbs, he said. —*PTI*

Didi reaffirms WB's rights on TMC foundation day

KOLKATA, 1 JAN

Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Wednesday marked its 28th foundation day with events across West Bengal, as TMC supremo and Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee emphasized that the party's struggle for the rights of the people of the state is ongoing and will continue in the future. Reflecting on the party's formation on 1 January, 1998, senior TMC leaders emphasised their commitment to the welfare of the country's common people. "First of all, I extend my heartfelt New Year's greetings to all of you. Along with this, today is also the foundation day of our party. Jai Hind! Jai Bangla! Bande Mataram! Long live Trinamool Congress! Long live Maa-Mati-Manush," Mamata Banerjee said in a Facebook post.—*PTI*

Fresh militant attack haunts Manipur

Forces seize huge cache of arms, ammunitions

IMPHAL, 1 JAN

Suspected militants launched fresh attack in the Kadangband area of Manipur's Imphal West district in the early hours of Wednesday, police said.

Militants from their hill positions in Kangpokpi district fired several rounds from sophisticated arms and hurled bombs at the low-lying Kadangband area in Imphal West district around 1am, a police officer said.

Village volunteers deployed in the area returned the fire even as additional security forces were rushed to the area to control the situation. No injuries were reported in the firing, the police said.

The attack forced several villagers living in Kutcha homes to flee to safer places, they said.

Kadangband area has witnessed several attacks by suspected militants since violence broke out in the state in May 2023.

Security forces seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition during search operations in Bishnupur and Thoubal districts, a police statement said.

From Thongkhonglok village in Bishnupur district, security forces on Tuesday seized one SLR with a magazine, one .303 rifle, one 12 bore single barrel gun, two 9mm pistol with magazine, one anti-riot gun, two INSAS LMG magazine, two INSAS rifle magazine, four hand grenades, one detonator, five anti-riot shell, ammunition and other articles, the statement said.

The security forces seized one anti material rifle (AMR) sniper modified with sight scope and magazine, two single bolt action rifle, three 9mm pistol (country made), one hand grenade, four MK-13T, and ammunition from Leishangthem Ikop Pat area of Thoubal district, it said. Meanwhile, police arrested a member of the banned outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (People's War Group) involved in extortion from Mantripukhri Bazaar near Bengali crossing in Imphal East district on Tuesday.

A day after Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh said "sorry" for the ethnic conflict in the northeastern state, senior Congress leader Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday said a mere apology was not enough as Singh should have resigned from his chair if he failed to handle the situation. also attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah for "ignoring" Manipur. —*PTI*

Security personnel during an operation and area domination in the fringe and vulnerable areas of hill and valley districts, in Manipur **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PTI

PM to lay foundation stone of college named after Savarkar

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to lay the foundation for two New Delhi University campuses in east and west Delhi, along with a college named after Veer Savarkar on 3 January, university sources said.

Approved by DU's executive council in 2021, the Savarkar College in Najafgarh will be built at a tentative cost of Rs 140 crore. The university has extended an invitation to the prime minister, and is awaiting a confirmation from the prime minister's office (PMO), the sources said.

The proposed east campus in Surajmal Vihar will be established at an estimated cost of Rs 373 crore, while the west campus in Dwarka is expected to cost Rs 107 crore.

In 2021, the executive council also approved a proposal to name a college after late BJP leader Sushma Swaraj.

DU Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh was given the authority to select names for the two upcoming colleges from a pool of names. —*PTI*

AHEAD OF POLLS

Kejri writes to Bhagwat, alleges wrongdoings by BJP

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

PHOTO: ANI

AAP supremo Arvind Kejriwal has written a letter to RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, alleging distribution of money and deletion of names of Purvanchali and Dalit voters by the BJP ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

The BJP has hit back at Kejriwal, saying his letter to Bhagwat is a reflection of his "political frustration" and "fear of defeat" in the polls due next month.

The war of words between AAP and Opposition BJP in Delhi has heated up, with prominent leaders from both sides trading barbs on various issues.

Kejriwal has sought Bhagwat's clarification on reports that the RSS will campaign for the BJP in the Delhi election.

"There have been media reports suggesting that the RSS will campaign for votes for the BJP in the Delhi elections. Is this true? Before this, people wish to know whether the RSS endorses the recent wrongful actions taken by the BJP," he has written in his letter to Bhagwat.

The AAP convenor has raised several questions in his letter dated 30 December, asking if the RSS supports money being "openly distributed" by BJP leaders to "buy" votes and "large-scale" deletion of names of Purvanchali and Dalit voters by the saffron party. BJP accused AAP and Kejriwal of helping illegal Rohingya Muslims and Bangladeshis stay in Delhi with documents and money, to use them as vote banks. Kejriwal has alleged that efforts are being made for mass deletion of votes of people, including Purvanchalis, Dalits and slum dwellers, and asked Bhagwat whether the BJP is not "weakening" the country's democracy in this manner. Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva has hit back at Kejriwal, saying he is "creating drama since Delhi people seek answers from him over his lies, opportunism and failure to meet their hopes of development and reforms". —*PTI*

SKM opts out of talks by SC panel on farmers' issues

CHANDIGARH, 1 JAN

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) expressed its inability on Wednesday to attend a 3 January meeting convened by a high-powered committee constituted by the Supreme Court to discuss farmers' issues.

"The High Powered Committee constituted by the Supreme Court has extended an invitation to the SKM to join its meeting scheduled on 3 January (at Panchkula, Haryana) to discuss the farmer's issues," a statement issued by the SKM said.

It added that the court had formed the committee in the context of the blockade at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points between Punjab and Haryana due to a farmers' stir, but the SKM is not part of that agitation.

Notably, farmers under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) have been camping at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points since 13 February last year, after their march to Delhi was stopped by security forces.

"The Supreme Court order dated 2 September, 2024 had cautioned the farmers to keep themselves at a safe distance from political parties and political issues and said all their issues will be considered in a phased manner by the intervention of the court. —*PTI*

Farmers under the banner of the SKM (Non-Political) and KMM have been camping at Shambhu, Khanauri border, since 13 Feb last year **PHOTO: PTI**

POST AGITATION

SIT to investigate Beed sarpanch murder case

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

The Maharashtra government on Wednesday formed a 10-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the murder of Massajog sarpanch Santosh Deshmukh, officials said.

The SIT will be headed by Crime Investigation Department's (CID) Deputy Inspector General Basavraj Teli, said an order issued by the state Home department.

Other members of the team are Anil Gujar, Deputy Superintendent of Police, CID;Vijaysingh Jonwal, Assistant Police Inspector of local crime branch, Beed; Mahesh Vighne, PSI of local crime branch, Beed; Anand Shinde, PSI of Kej Police Station; ASI Tulshiram Jagtap; and police constables Manoj Wagh, Chandrakant Kalkute, Balasaheb Ahankare and Santosh Gitte, the order said.

Deshmukh, sarpanch of Massajog in Kej tehsil of Beed district, was abducted and brutally killed on 9 December, allegedly for opposing an extortion bid by some persons who had demanded money from a windmill company.

Residents of Massajog village staged 'jal samadhi' agitation seeking the arrest of three absconding accused in the Santosh Deshmukh murder case. The protest, during which 40 men and women stood waist-deep in a lake, was called off after two hours, as district Superintendent of Police Navneet Kanwat assured them that police will leave no stone unturned to nab the accused. —*PTI*

SC to hear Owaisi's plea on Places of Worship law today

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on 2 January a plea of AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi seeking implementation of the 1991 places of worship law, which asks to maintain the religious character of a place as it existed on 15 August, 1947.

The Parliamentarian, who heads the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, filed the plea on 17 December, 2024, through advocate Fuzail Ahmad Ayyubi.

Owaisi, in his plea, has sought a direction to the Centre to ensure effective implementation of the law, said his counsel.

He also referred to instances where several courts had ordered survey of mosques on pleas by Hindu litigants, he said. It is likely that the top court would on 2 January tag Owaisi's plea. —*PTI*

India and Pakistan exchange list of nuclear installations

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

India and Pakistan on Wednesday exchanged a list of their nuclear installations under a bilateral pact that prohibits the two sides from attacking each other's atomic facilities, in continuing an over-three-decade practice.

The exchange of the list took place under the provisions of an agreement on the prohibition of attacks against nuclear installations and facilities, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

"India and Pakistan today exchanged, through diplomatic channels, simultaneously at New Delhi and Islamabad, the list of nuclear installations and facilities covered under the agreement on the prohibition of attack against nuclear installation and facilities," the MEA said.

The exchange of the list came amid frosty ties between the two countries over the Kashmir issue as well as cross-border terrorism. —*PTI*

Going to Kerala to assist govt, not to confront it: Arlekar

PANAJI, 1 JAN

Newly appointed Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar said on Wednesday that wherever he goes, he does not try to confront the government or the administration; he goes there to assist the government.

"Wherever I go, I don't try to have any confrontation with the government nor with the administration. I am going there to assist the government, it is not to guide or pass any direction, nothing of that sort," Arlekar said in an official statement.

Earlier today, before taking the oath as Governor of Kerala, Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, met with Goa Governor PS Sreedharan Pillai at Raj Bhavan.

"It is a good coincidence that I am going to Kerala as Governor. Before going to Kerala, I wanted to hear a lot about Kerala from PS Sreedharan Pillai (Goa Governor) because he is from Kerala... so that I can go there and work properly...I will make full use of whatever he has told," Arlekar said. —*ANI*

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan with newly appointed Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar in Thiruvananthapuram, on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

2026 ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

BJP eyes gains in WB amid B'desh turmoil

KOLKATA, 1 JAN

The violence against Hindus in Bangladesh has provided a fillip to West Bengal BJP's membership drive, as the party struggles to meet its ambitious 1-crore target, while campaigning against the atrocities on minorities across the border to consolidate Hindu support in the state.

The crisis has provided the party with a rallying point as it seeks to counter challenges posed by organisational gaps, internal discord and the ruling Trinamool Congress's (TMC) political dominance.

Both TMC and BJP are leveraging the Bangladesh issue to shape the political narrative ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections.

"The Bangladesh turmoil... has accelerated the membership drive as people see the BJP as the only party capable of ensuring stability. They are afraid of similar events under TMC's rule, which is known for its minority appeasement," said state BJP president Sukanta Majumdar.

Top BJP leaders conducted an aggressive campaign across West Bengal for the past one month, focusing on the plight of the Hindu community in Bangladesh. "West Bengal's future is at stake under TMC rule. If we allow the TMC to continue its appeasement politics, we are inviting the same crisis we see unfolding in Bangladesh. The BJP is the only party capable of providing true security for our people," Leader of the Opposition Suvendu Adhikari had said at rallies.

A senior BJP leader, speaking on the condition of anonymity, said, "The fiery speeches, focusing on the protection of Bengal's cultural identity and Hindu community, are aimed at energising party workers and gaining momentum for the membership drive. They yielded positive results, as youngsters are taking up membership in huge numbers, especially in bordering districts." —*PTI*

Both TMC and BJP are leveraging the Bangladesh issue to shape the political narrative ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections **PHOTO: X**

- The crisis has provided the party with a rallying point as it seeks to counter challenges posed by organisational gaps, internal discord and the ruling Trinamool Congress's (TMC) political dominance

Parole is prisoners' right: CPI(M) on Kodi Suni's release

T'PURAM, 1 JAN

The ruling CPI(M) in Kerala on Wednesday said parole is the right of prisoners, and there is no need to deny it in any manner.

Granting parole to a prisoner is a matter related to the government and the jail authorities and the party has nothing to do with it, CPI(M) state secretary MV Govindan said when reporters sought his reaction to widespread criticism over granting parole to Kodi Suni, a convict in the 2012 TP Chandrasekharan murder case.

"The CPI(M) does not take a stand on granting or denying parole to anyone. It has nothing to do with the party. These matters are connected to the government and the prisons, and they will be dealt with accordingly," he said.

When asked about granting parole to Suni, ignoring a police report against him, the party leader said it was a matter which should be examined by the government and the CPI(M) has no issue in it. "Parole is the right of prisoners. There is no need to deny it any way," he said.

Kodi Suni, one of the convicts in the murder case who is currently lodged in Tavanur prison, was granted parole for 30 days by the jail DGP based on a recommendation of the Kerala State Human Rights Commission.

Suni was released on parole on 28 December, which was said to be the first time in six years. —*PTI*

MV Govindan **PHOTO: X**

Engg student kills parents after tiff over his education

Nagpur, 1 Jan

An engineering student in Maharashtra's Nagpur allegedly killed his parents apparently due to differences with them over his education and career, police said on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old accused, Utkarsh Dhakhole, killed his parents at their residence in Kapil Nagar area of the city on 26 December and the double murder came to light on Wednesday morning after neighbours complained of a foul smell, an official said. After the recovery of the decomposed bodies of his parents, Utkarsh was arrested and he confessed to killing them. The deceased are Liladhar Dhakhole, 55, and his 50-year-old wife Aruna, he said. "Utkarsh strangled his mother, a teacher, around noon on 26 December and later stabbed his father to death when he returned home around 5 pm. —*PTI*

Botanist KS Manilal dies at 86

THRISSUR, 1 JAN

Eminent botanist and Padmashree awardee KS Manilal, celebrated for translating the ancient Latin text Hortus Malabaricus' into English and Malayalam, died following age-related ailments, family sources said here on Wednesday. He was 86. Kattungal Subrahmanyan Manilal, popularly known as KS Manilal, was a former head of the Department of Botany at the University of Calicut. His decades-long contributions to botany, particularly his efforts to translate Hortus Malabaricus, a 17th century botanical treatise documenting the rich flora of Malabar region (south-western coast of India) into English and Malayalam, earned him widespread recognition. The treatise remains a vital resource for researchers, academicians. —*PTI*

Mizoram loses Rs 336.49 cr due to swine fever

AIZAWL, 1 JAN

Mizoram suffered a loss of Rs 336.49 crore due to the outbreak of African Swine Fever (ASF) in 2024, officials of the state's Animal Husbandry and Veterinary department said. So far, the state has suffered Rs 896.69 crore loss due to the dreaded pig disease since 2021, they said.

At least 14,950 pigs have died due to ASF and 24,177 others culled in the hilly state from January to December, 2024 according to the data provided by the department to PTI.

The ASF outbreak was first reported at Lungsen village in south Mizoram's Lunglei district near the Bangladesh border on 21 March, 2021 and 33,417 pigs died during that year, officials said.

Additionally, 12,568 pigs were culled in 2021 as a precaution to prevent the pig disease from spreading.—*PTI*

8 from Pak get 20-year jail in 2015 drugs case

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

A special court here on Wednesday sentenced eight Pakistani nationals to 20 years imprisonment in a 2015 case of seizure of more than 200 kg of drugs valued at nearly Rs 7 crore.

The court also imposed a fine of Rs 2 lakh on each of the convicts.

In 2015, the Indian Coast Guard apprehended the accused from a boat carrying 232 kg of heroin valued at Rs 6.96 crore off the Gujarat coast.

As per the prosecution, there were 11 drums on the boat with 20 plastic pouches containing a wheatish brown colour powder.

The contents of each packet were tested, which revealed it to be heroin, it said. The eight Pakistan nationals were also found in possession of three satellite phones, GPS navigation charts, among other electronic devices. —*XXXX*

INDIA DECLARES 2025 AS YEAR OF DEFENCE REFORMS

MoD lists simpler procurement, theaterisation as priorities

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

India on Wednesday declared 2025 as the year of defence reforms and that the aim will be to facilitate rolling out integrated theatre commands to bolster synergy among the three services and transform the military into a technologically advanced combat-ready force.

The broader aim of the reforms would be to make the defence acquisition procedures simpler and time-sensitive, ensure deeper collaboration among key stakeholders, break silos, eliminate inefficiencies and optimise utilisation of resources.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the reforms would lay the foundation for "unprecedented" advancements in defence preparedness and ensure India's security and sovereignty amid challenges of the 21st century.

The defence ministry's aim on theatre commands assumes significance as it virtually indicated the plan to unveil the reform measure in 2025. Under the theaterisation model, the government seeks to integrate the capabilities of the Army, Air Force and Navy and optimally utilise their resources for wars and operations.

As per the theaterisation plan, each of the theatre commands will have units of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force and all of them will work as a single entity looking after security challenges in a specified geographical territory.

At present, the Army, Navy and the Air Force have separate commands.

The decision on observing 2025 as year of reforms and the broad objectives under it were finalised at a high-level meeting chaired by Singh. The ministry said the focus in 2025 will also be on new domains such as cyber and space, emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning, hypersonic and robotics.

"Year of Reforms will be a momentous step in modernisation journey of the armed forces," Singh said. It was unanimously decided to observe 2025 as the Year of Reforms to give impetus to the ongoing and future reforms, the ministry said. —*PTI*

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Upendra Dwivedi and others **PHOTO: PTI**

Navy to launch 1 sub, 2 warships on 15 Jan

The Indian Navy will on 15 January commission two indigenously constructed frontline warships and a diesel-electric submarine that is expected to significantly enhance the force's overall combat prowess.

The three platforms – guided-missile destroyer Surat, stealth frigate Nilgiri and submarine Vagsheer – are equipped with the latest weapons and sensors, officials said on Wednesday.

They will be commissioned at a ceremony at the naval dockyard in Mumbai. The two warships also include specific accommodations to support a sizeable complement of women officers and sailors. —*PTI*

Curfew in Jalgaon after clashes break out over road incident

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

Curfew has been imposed at a village in north Maharashtra's Jalgaon district following clashes over atrivial dispute involving the driver of a minister's car and a group of locals, officials said on Wednesday morning.

Seven people were arrested so far as several shops were set on fire and public property was damaged during the violence at Palthi village, a senior police official said.

There was a heated exchange between a group of locals and the driver of state minister Gulabrao Patil's car in Kasaiwada area of the village late Tuesday night when the driver honked and asked them to give way, he said.

Patil, a Shiv Sena leader and the minister for water supply and sanitation, was not present, but a member of his family was riding in the car.

While the altercation ended at the spot, some persons from the locality later went to a village square and protested, the official said. Another group then arrived there, leading to clashes till early in the morning. Several shops in the village were burnt, the official said. Additional police personnel, State Reserve Police Force and Riot Control Police teams alongside fire brigade vehicles were deployed in the village, he said, adding that the situation was now under control. —*PTI*

Screengrab from the video showing police personnel at Palthi village in Maharashtra's Jalgaon after curfew was imposed there **PHOTO: ANI**

BR Ambedkar's statue vandalised in UP, probe on

BALLIA, 1 JAN

A statue of BR Ambedkar was defaced by throwing motor oil on it in Chaube Chhapra village, prompting the local police to register a case against against unidentified people, officials said on Wednesday.

According to the police, the incident occurred last night when some unidentified person poured motor oil over the statue. The act of vandalism was discovered by villagers who went out for a morning walk on Wednesday and informed the police.

Revati SHO Rohan Rakesh Singh said a case has been registered against unidentified individuals under relevant sections of the BNS, based on a complaint filed by a villager, Vikas Kumar. —*PTI*

SHOOTS VIDEO

Harassed by locals, Agra man kills 4 sisters, mom

LUCKNOW, 1 JAN

A 24-year-old man in Uttar Pradesh allegedly murdered his mother and four sisters at a Hotel Sharanjit in Lucknow, after serving them alcohol and intoxicating food, police said on Tuesday.

The man in a video claimed that he killed them because he did not want his "sisters to be sold". In the video, which he shot while killing the family, Arshad, 25, alleges that neighbours and land mafia in their hometown Budaun captured their house. The man said the locals spread rumours that his family is Bangladeshis and harassed them.

He alleges that people named Ranu, Aftab, Aleem Khan, Salim, Arif, Ahmad and Azha were land mafias and planned to traffick his sisters too.

"When police get this video, they must know that they harassed us to capture our house. We raised our voice, but no one heard. It has been 15 days that we have been sleeping on the footpath, wandering in the cold. We don't want the children to wander in the cold," says Arshad

"I have a plea to the Lucknow police and Yogi Ji (UP CM Yogi Adityanath) -- Do not spare such Muslims. These Muslims are involved in land grabbing and oppression everywhere," Arshad added.

Meanwhile, the police said the accused has been arrested

The deceased are Alia, 9; Alshia, 19; Aksa, 16; and Rahmeen, 18; -- all sisters of Arshad. The fifth is Asma, the mother of the accused, according to police. Arshad is a native of Agra.

Arshad said he killed his mother and three sisters and the fourth was about to die. He also showed the bodies and said he choked them and slit their wrists and that his father helped him. The father Badar is a suspect and is still at large. He said his family originally hailed from Budaun and possessed documents dating back to 1947 through his aunt, proving their identity. Arshad said, "We wanted to convert to Hinduism because of the harassment from the locality. We wanted to build a temple there and live peacefully." —*Agencies*

Cops during an investigation after five members of a family were found dead at a hotel, in Lucknow on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

44 yrs after riots, temple in Moradabad reopens

MORADABAD, 1 JAN

Decades after it was closed over communal violence in Moradabad, a temple in the Daulatabagh area has been reopened by local administration and authorities, according to officials.

The development comes in light of multiple abandoned or locked temples in various parts of Uttar Pradesh being reopened for prayers.

After 44 years, the temple was reopened on Monday, officials said.

"On the administration's orders, a team comprising police and municipal corporation staff began operations to reopen the temple. There has been no opposition or unrest, and the locals are cooperating in the effort," Nagphani Police Inspector Sunil Kumar said.

After the reopening, it was found that some temple idols were misplaced or missing, Kumar said. —*PTI*

Singhvi backs collegium move against judges' kin

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Hailing the Supreme Court collegium's proposal against the appointment of close kin of the judges in the high courts, noted lawyer and Congress leader Abhishek Singhvi has said they should be implemented sooner as judicial appointments are "non objective" than originally conceived.

"If true, both proposals under SC collegium consideration, seemingly radical, are good and should be implemented sooner rather than later," Singhvi posted on X. "Reality of judicial appointments is much murkier and much more non objective than originally conceived. Mutual Back scratching, uncle judges, family lineages etc demoralise others and bring disrepute to institution," he said. "But easier said than done: till now we are unable to even ban lawyer relatives practising in same HC as judge relatives. Time and again the system has proved stronger than desirable impulses for reform," Singhvi said. The proposal, if acted upon, could bring more inclusivity in such appointments and erase the perception of lineage outweighing merit in judicial appointments, he said.

While this proposal may disqualify some deserving candidates, it would open up opportunities for first-generation lawyers and broaden the representation of diverse communities in the constitutional courts, a source said. —*PTI*

Katra returns to normalcy after 16 ropeway protesters released

KATRA/JAMMU, 1 JAN

Eighteen people detained by the police during protests against the ropeway project in Jammu and Kashmir's Katra, the base camp of the Mata Vaishno Devi shrine, were released, sparking overnight celebrations in the holy town.

Katra resumed normal business activity on Wednesday after a week-long shutdown protesting a proposed ropeway project in the Trikuta hills of Reasi district.

"All shops, restaurants, and business establishments reopened after a week-long closure due to the shutdown, while traffic movement was also restored, bringing much relief to the pilgrims," an official said. —*PTI*

Shopkeepers in Katra had gone on a hunger strike in protest against the proposed ropeway **PHOTO: PTI**

'Lucky Baskhar' borrowed from 'Scam': Hansal

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Director Hansal Mehta has claimed that producer Naga Vamsi's hit Telugu movie 'Lucky Baskhar' has borrowed "liberally" from his successful web series 'Scam'.

Mehta's allegations came after Vamsi in a roundtable interview said that the Hindi film industry focuses on making films for Mumbai's posh areas like Bandra and Juhu, directing his comments at veteran producer Boney Kapoor.

Reacting to the producer's remarks, Mehta posted on X, saying he was happy that the story of a Hindi series like Scam was translated successfully in another language. —*PTI*

AT LUDHIANA CONCERT

Diljit gets notice over pro-alcohol songs

LUDHIANA, 1 JAN

Singer and actor Diljit Dosanjh's highly anticipated New Year's Eve concert in Ludhiana was marred by legal controversy following a complaint filed by Punditrao Dharenavar, an assistant professor from Chandigarh.

The complaint prompted the Deputy Director of the Women and Child Department, Government of Punjab, to issue a formal notice to Ludhiana's District Commissioner, urging them to prevent the singer from performing certain songs during his live show on 31 December, 2024.

The notice, which was addressed to the authorities in Ludhiana, calls for a ban on songs that have been accused of promoting alcohol, such as 'Patiala Pegg', '5 Tara Theke', and 'Case (Jeeb Vicho Feem Labbiya)', even if modified with altered lyrics.

The complaint references prior warnings issued to Diljit Dosanjh by various commissions, where he was advised against performing these controversial tracks.

Despite these advisories, the singer has allegedly continued to perform them with slight alterations to the lyrics.

Panditrao Dharenavar, who filed the complaint, expressed strong concerns over the impact of such songs, particularly on young audiences, especially when underage children are in the audience.

Further complicating the situation, Dharenavar cited a ruling from the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which in 2019 directed the police to ensure that no songs promoting alcohol, drugs, or violence are played at public events, including live concerts.

According to the court's decision, songs that glorify substances like alcohol or drugs have a detrimental impact on impressionable children.

Panditrao has also made it clear that he is prepared to escalate the matter to the Punjab and Haryana High Court if the concert proceeds with these tracks.

The Ludhiana concert, which was added as a last-minute stop on Dosanjh's 'Dil-Luminati' India Tour, marked the grand finale of his three-month nationwide performance schedule. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

- The Ludhiana concert, which was added as a last-minute stop on Dosanjh's 'Dil-Luminati' India Tour, marked the grand finale of his three-month nationwide performance schedule.

MAN KILLS SELF IN DELHI, FAMILY ALLEGES HARASSMENT BY WIFE

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

A 40-year-old man allegedly died by suicide by hanging himself from a ceiling fan at his residence in Kalyan Vihar area of northwest Delhi, an official said on Wednesday.

The family members of the deceased identified as Puneet Khurana, a businessman, have alleged harassment against the wife and in-laws.

"Khurana's father Trilok Nath has produced his mobile phone and other related articles. The mobile phone of the deceased and other related articles were taken in police possession. The body will be handed over to the family members after post-mortem," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP), Northwest, Bhisham Singh.

The DCP further said that the incident was reported at approximately 4:18 pm on December 31.

"Soon after information, a team was immediately rushed to the spot. The team found Khurana unresponsive on his bed with a ligature mark around his neck, indicating death by hanging," he said, adding further investigation is underway.

The body was transported to the BJRM Hospital and has been preserved for a post-mortem examination, police said. —*PTI*

HERE COMES GEN BETA

Newborn babies at Nowrosjee Wadia Maternity Hospital in Mumbai on New Year's Day, as the world population reaches 8.09 billion. The onset of 2025 marks the beginning of Generation Beta, born between 2025 and 2039, following Gen Alpha, Gen Z and millennials ***PHOTO: PTI***

Temple-mosque spats rocked UP in 2024

After the consecration ('Pran Pratishtha') of the Ram temple at Ayodhya on 24 January, numerous temple-mosque disputes mushroomed in Uttar Pradesh (UP) in 2024. They culminated in Sambhal where four lives were lost after a court-ordered survey of Shahi Jama Masjid which Hindu groups claimed was the site of an ancient temple. Here is a brief recap of religious disputes that surfaced this year in UP:

After the consecration of Ram temple at Ayodhya, numerous temple-mosque disputes mushroomed in Uttar Pradesh ***PHOTO: PTI***

Sambhal
Sambhal has been in the eye of the storm since 19 November, when a Mughal-era mosque was surveyed on court orders following claims that a Harihar temple previously stood at the site.

Violence erupted during a second survey on November 24 as protesters gathered near the Shahi Jama Masjid and clashed with security personnel. Four people were killed and several injured in the violence.

Budan
A Hindu outfit has moved a local court seeking permission to offer prayers at the Jama Masjid Shamsi, claiming it to be a temple. The court asked the Muslim side on Tuesday to conclude their arguments in the matter by 10 December.

The issue dates back to 2022 when Mukesh Patel, the then convener of the Akhil Bharat Hindu Mahasabha, claimed that a Neelkanth Mahadev temple existed at the site of the mosque.

Varanasi
In the Gyanvapi case, Hindus claim that a temple existed at the site and it was demolished in the 17th century on the orders of Aurangzeb. According to Madan Mohan Yadav, the lawyer for the Hindu side, the Gyanvapi temple or the Adi Visheshwar Kashi Vishwanath Jyotirling was demolished on April 18, 1679 following Aurangzeb's orders.

Yadav said Aurangzeb's secretary, Wazir Saqi Mustaid Khan, has mentioned this in his diary 'Maasire Alamgiri' which is preserved in the Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

Mathura
In the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Idgah dispute in Mathura, the controversy is related to the Shahi Idgah mosque that was built during Aurangzeb's time. It is alleged that the mosque was built after demolishing a temple at the birthplace of Lord Krishna.

However, the Muslim side (the management committee of the Shahi Idgah and the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board) to the dispute has opposed the plea on several grounds.

Lucknow
In Lucknow, the additional district judge on February 28 dismissed a revision plea that had challenged a lower court's order rejecting an objection against a civil suit that had sought the right to worship at the Laxman Teela, where the Teelewali Masjid is situated.

According to the civil suit filed by a Hindu side, a temple of Shesh Nagesh Teeleshwar Mahadev is situated in close vicinity of the mosque.

Baghpat
In February, a court in Baghpat dismissed a decades-old plea filed by a Muslim side over a site that Hindu devotees feel is the Mahabharat-era "Lakshagriha". The petitioners had claimed that it was a graveyard and the dargah of Sufi saint Sheikh Badruddin.

According to Ranveer Singh Tomar, the lawyer for the respondents, Civil Judge Junior Division of the District and Session Court Shivam Dwivedi dismissed the petition, saying there was neither a graveyard nor a dargah at the site in Barnawa.

Jaunpur
A court here on 16 December has postponed the date of passing order for the survey of Atala Masjid till March 2 in view of the Supreme Court's instructions to all courts to refrain from passing orders in cases related to religious places under the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

In the Atala Masjid case, the suit was filed by the Swaraj Vahini Association (SVA) president Santosh Kumar Mishra. It sought the "disputed" property be declared 'Atala Devi Mandir' and followers of the Sanatan religion be allowed the right of worship at the site.

No final verdict has been delivered by the courts in these cases, as the Supreme Court on 12 December restrained all the courts in the country from entertaining and passing any effective interim or final orders on any lawsuits seeking reliefs including survey of religious places under the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

The direction of a bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justices Sanjay Kumar and K V Viswanathan came on a batch of pleas and cross pleas relating to the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

On 16 December, RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat had said that certain people, ever since the construction of Ayodhya's Ram temple, have started to believe that they can become "leaders of Hindus" by raking up such issues.

Delivering a lecture in Pune on 'India-The Vishwaguru' at Sahjeevan Vyakhyanmala (lecture series), Bhagwat advocated for an "inclusive society". "Every day a new matter (dispute) is being raked up. How can this be allowed? This cannot continue. India needs to show that we can live together," he said.

What people fell on the issue
"The ordering of the survey in Sambhal by the magistrate was against the spirit of law. The magistrate should have issued a notice to the state and the mosque, and thereafter, the lawyers or the court ameens should have been appointed for the survey work. There was no urgency," Justice (retired) D P Singh told PTI.

Ankur Saxena, an advocate of the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court, however, had a different take. "Sooner or later, this facade and burden of secularism, which we have carried had to break at some point of time. Satyamev Jayate (Truth alone triumphs). The problem in my mind is the appeasement policy adopted by previous governments," Saxena told PTI.

Acharya Satyendra Das, the head priest of the Ram temple, Ayodhya, said, "Just the way the Ramjanmabhoomi case was decided, in the same manner, cases regarding evidence of temples should also be similarly decided by the court." *—PTI*

SALAR

Are Human Rights eroding under Yunus in B'desh?

Bangladesh's interim leader, Muhammad Yunus, spoke with US national security advisor Jake Sullivan last week amid growing international concern over reports of attacks on minority Hindus and their temples in the predominatly Muslim nation.

"Both leaders expressed their commitment to respecting and protecting the human rights of all people, regardless of religion," according to a White House statement.

Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh say they are being oppressed under the interim government ***PHOTO: PTI***

Rising violence and persecution of minorities
Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh say they are being oppressed under the interim government that was installed after former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to neighboring India in August 2024 following her ouster by a student-led uprising.

In one of the latest incidents, 17 houses belonging to the Christian Tripura community in southeastern Bangladesh's Bandarban were reportedly set on fire on Christmas Eve. In response, Yunus' office condemned the attack, stating that such actions are "deplorable and unacceptable."

While security measures have been increased in Bandarban, the Rights and Risks Analysis Group (RRAG), a human rights watchdog, has criticized Yunus for his failure to address the escalating violations of the rights of indigenous peoples and religious minorities.

Yunus: reports of rights violations exaggerated
RRAG identified serious violations, noting that more than 2,72,000 individuals — primarily political opponents — have been implicated in 1,598 criminal cases within the first 100 days of Yunus' administration. The organiSation reported that between September 19 and October 1, at least four Indigenous people were killed, and more than 75 others were injured.

Nur Khan Liton, a human rights activist and member of the Commission of Inquiry into Enforced Disappearances, which was set up by the interim government, told DW that individuals implicated in criminal cases often face physical assault during their detention.

In response to the growing concerns, Yunus asserted that the reports of rights violations were widely exaggerated, the AP news agency reported.

During a visit to Dhaka by Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri earlier this month, his Bangladeshi counterpart, Mohammad Jashim Uddin, said that Bangladesh's internal matters should not be subject to foreign interference.

Uddin told reporters that Bangladesh asked India not to interfere in its internal affairs, the Dhaka-based Daily Star reported.

Custodial deaths raise alarm
Several leaders of Hasina's Awami League (AL) have died in custody during the interim government's rule, sparking serious concern and controversy.

Within just 29 days, four AL leaders reportedly died of "heart attacks" while detained in Bogura prison, bringing the total number of AL members and activists who have died in police custody over the last four months to at least ten.

Family members of the leaders who died while incarcerated said that there were tell-tale signs of torture on some of the victims.

Bangladesh's former Minister for Information and Broadcasting Mohammad Ali Arafat told DW that the truth behind these deeply suspicious and unnatural deaths — whether homicides or not — would eventually come to light.

"Moreover, none of the family members could file a case and their access to justice has also been denied," he added.

Upholding Bangladesh's free press
Journalists aligned with the former Hasina government say they are facing increasing persecution under the Yunus administration, which has been accused of systematically suppressing independent media.

There have been more than 354 journalists harassed, 74 cases of violence reported, 113 criminal charges filed, and press credentials revoked for 167 journalists, according to the RRAG report.

The Committee to Protect Journalists and Reporters Without Borders (RSF) have urged the interim government to ensure fair trials and uphold procedural rights for reporters.

The interim government has previously vowed to restore democracy and uphold the free press.

In an October interview with the country's largest newspaper, Prothom Alo, Yunus advocated for media freedom.

"Write as you please. Criticize. Unless you write, how will we know what is happening or not happening?" he said.

Masood Kamal, a senior news editor, told DW that journalists aligned with Hasina's government are losing their jobs under the interim government.

"The supporters of the new regime are targeting journalists aligned with the previous administration by implicating them in various cases," he stated.

Concerns over police demoralisation
Lawyers have also encountered restrictions, with legal cases being initiated against those who speak out against the interim government. Eminent lawyer and rights activist ZI Khan Panna, while speaking to DW, expressed grave concerns over the deteriorating legal environment.

He revealed that lawyers defending individuals accused in these allegedly fabricated cases are reportedly being assaulted inside court premises and later taken to police stations, where they are falsely implicated in additional cases — all while still wearing their legal gowns.

"Bangladesh has never witnessed anything like this before," Panna remarked, highlighting the unprecedented nature of the situation. Yunus' interim government has faced widespread criticism for granting impunity to those responsible for the deaths of 44 police officers during student protests.

Barrister Andaleeve Rahman, leader of the Centre-Right Bangladesh Jatiya Party, expressed concerns to DW about the negative precedent set by this impunity. *—DW News*

LETTERS

write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

A total eclipse of the Moon, Saturn's rings 'disappear' & more in 2025

In addition to the annual parade of star pictures or constellations passing above our heads each night, there are always exciting events to look out for in the sky. The year 2025 is no exception and has its fair share of such events.

Though the night sky is more spectacular from a dark country sky, you can see the events outlined here even if, like many others, you live in a light-polluted city. For most events you do not need a telescope or binoculars.

Here are some of the highlights.

March and September: eclipses of the Moon
During the early morning of Monday 8 September, the full Moon will move into the shadow of Earth and be totally eclipsed. The Moon will turn a red or coppery colour, because sunlight is bent or refracted by Earth's atmosphere onto the Moon. The bent light is red, as we are looking at the reflection of sunrises and sunsets from around the globe.

Total eclipses of the Moon are more common than those of the Sun. They can be seen from all the regions on Earth where it is night.

Unlike eclipses of the Sun, lunar eclipses are safe to watch with the unaided eye. They are also safe to photograph. A tripod will help, as will a camera or phone able to take timed exposures.

The eclipse starts with Earth's shadow gradually covering the Moon over about an hour. Similarly, after totality the shadow takes about an hour to leave the Moon.

Seen from Australia's east coast, the total eclipse will last from from 3.30am to 4:53am on 8 September. From New Zealand, this will be from 5:30am to moonset; from South Australia or the Northern Territory, 3am to 4.23am, and from Western Australia 1.30am to 2.53am.

Earlier in the year, on the evening of Friday 14 March, people in Aotearoa New Zealand will be able to see a totally eclipsed Moon as it rises above the horizon just after sunset. Watchers in eastern Australia will also get a brief glimpse of a partially eclipsed Moon after moonrise, for 34 minutes from Sydney, 43 minutes from Brisbane and 16 minutes from Cairns.

During the early morning of Monday 8 September, the full Moon will move into the shadow of Earth and be totally eclipsed ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

March: Saturn's 'disappearing' rings
Gazing at Saturn and its rings through a telescope is always a thrill, whether you are seeing them for the first or the hundredth time. However, in early 2025 the rings will seem to vanish as Earth passes through the plane of the rings.

This phenomenon occurs twice during Saturn's 29-year path around the Sun, that is, at roughly 15-year intervals. Unfortunately, on 24 March, the date when this will occur, the planet will be too close to the Sun in the sky for us to observe.

However, in the evenings until mid-February and in the morning from late March we will be able to see Saturn with quite narrow, tilted rings.

Note that a small telescope is needed to see Saturn with or without its rings. If you don't have one yourself, you can go on a night tour at a public observatory like Sydney Observatory or an observing session with a local astronomical group, such as those at Melbourne Observatory with the Astronomical Society of Victoria.

May and December: meteor showers
The two main meteor showers of the year are the Eta Aquariids and the Geminids.

In 2025, the Eta Aquariids are best seen on the morning of Wednesday 7 May, while the Geminids will be most visible on the mornings of Sunday 14 December and 15 Monday December 15.

This year, viewing conditions for both meteor showers are favourable, in the sense that there will be no bright Moon in the sky during those mornings. To see them, look towards the north-east (Eta Aquariids) and north (Geminids) before dawn starts brightening the sky.

The darker the sky you can find, the better. Keep away from street lights or any other light.

January, April and August: planets
The five planets you can see with the naked eye – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn – move across the sky along a line called the ecliptic.

As the planets move, they sometimes appear to pass close to each other and take on interesting patterns. Of course, they only appear close from our point of view. In reality the planets are tens or hundreds of million kilometres apart.

In 2025, these patterns include:
18–19 January: the brightest planet, Venus, is close to the ringed planet Saturn in the evening sky

1–15 April: Mercury, Venus and Saturn form a slowly changing compact group in the eastern sky near sunrise

12–13 August: Venus and Jupiter, the two brightest planets, are only separated by two moon-widths in the morning sky.

June and August: constellations
As the year progresses, different constellations appear in the evening sky. The perpetual chase of Orion and Scorpius (the hunter and the scorpion) across the sky was noted in 2024.

In 2025, keep an eye on the Southern Cross (known as Crux to astronomers) and Sagittarius (the archer).

The Southern Cross is the best-known constellation in the southern sky.

It is easy to find, as it is made up of a compact group of bright stars in the shape of a cross.

Two pointer stars from the neighbouring constellation of Centaurus, the centaur, also help to show its position. From Sydney and further south, the Southern Cross is always above the horizon. However, in the evenings, it is best viewed around June, when it is high in the southern sky. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Donald Trump to attend Jimmy Carter's funeral

PALM BEACH, 1 JAN

US president-elect Donald Trump said that he's planning to attend the funeral of former president Jimmy Carter. Asked about it as he walked into a New Year's Eve party at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, Trump responded, "I'll be there." Pressed on whether he'd spoken to members of Carter's family, Trump said he'd rather not say. Funeral services honouring Carter, who died Sunday at age 100, will be held in Georgia and Washington, beginning 4January and concluding 9 January. Trump was a frequent and fierce critic of Carter on the campaign trail ahead of November's election, using the rising inflation rates of the 1970s to unfavourably compare President Joe Biden to Carter and his administration. *—PTI*

Taiwan president vows to boost defence budget

TAIPEI, 1 JAN

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te pledged to strengthen the island's defences in the face of escalating Chinese threats, saying in a New Year's address on Wednesday that Taiwan was a crucial part of the "line of defence of democracy" globally. China claims Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy, is part of its territory and has vowed to annex the island by force if necessary. Beijing has used a variety of tactics in recent years to increase pressure on Taiwan, from sending warships and fighter jets toward the island on a near-daily basis to pressuring Taiwan's diplomatic allies to switch their recognition to China. In response, Taiwan has been reforming its military and buying weapons from the United States, its biggest unofficial ally. *—PTI*

Germany, France, Poland condemn violence in Georgia

BERLIN, 1 JAN

The foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland expressed concern about "the political crisis" in Georgia, two days after former soccer player Mikheil Kavelashvili was formally inaugurated as president, cementing the ruling party's grip in what the opposition calls a blow to the country's European Union aspirations and a victory for former imperial ruler Russia. In reaction to the Russia-friendly course of the ruling Georgian Dream party, the three countries said they would "implement the EU decision on ending visa-free travel for Georgian diplomatic and service passport holders and consider additional measures on EU and national level." Georgia's outgoing president boycotted the post-election parliamentary sessions and demanded a rerun of the ballot. *—PTI*

3 killed in separate terror attacks in Pakistan

PESHAWAR, 1 JAN

At least three people, including a child, were killed and 11 others injured in three separate terror incidents in Pakistan's restive northwest on Wednesday. A police constable and a labourer were killed and two others injured when unidentified militants attacked a police checkpost in Daraban area in Dera Ismail Khan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa at 1 am this morning, police said. In a separate incident, a child was killed and four others were injured when a bomb planted in a bike exploded in South Waziristan district, police said. In another incident, at least five policemen were injured in an explosion caused by a roadside bomb in Mamaskhel area of Bannu district. *—PTI*

US sanctions Russia, Iran groups over poll interference

US says the entities used AI to make fake videos on candidates

WASHINGTON DC, 1 JAN

The United States has imposed sanctions on two groups linked to Iranian and Russian efforts to target American voters with disinformation ahead of this year's election.

US intelligence has accused both governments of spreading disinformation, including fake videos, news stories and social media posts, designed to manipulate voters and undermine trust in US elections.

"The governments of Iran and Russia have targeted our election processes and institutions and sought to divide the American people through targeted disinformation campaigns," Bradley T Smith, Treasury's acting undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in a statement.

US have blamed the Iranian government for seeking to encourage protests in the US over Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Authorities said the Russian group, the Moscow-based Centre for Geopolitical Expertise, oversaw the creation, financing and dissemination of disinformation about American candidates, including deepfake videos created using artificial intelligence. In addition to the group itself, the new sanctions apply to its director, who authorities say worked closely with Russian military intelligence agents also overseeing cyber-attacks and sabotage against the West. They say the centre created scores of fake news websites designed to look legitimate.

The Iranian group, the Cognitive Design Production Centre, is a subsidiary of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, US officials said, which the US has designated a foreign terrorist organisation. US intelligence agencies have blamed Iran for seeking to encourage protests in the US over Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza. Iran also has been accused of hacking into the accounts of several top current and former US officials. *—PTI*

Court rules out death penalty for 9/11 terrorists

WASHINGTON DC, 1 JAN

A United States military appeals court has ruled against Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin's effort to throw out the plea deals reached for Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and two other defendants in the 9/11 attacks, a US official said.

The decision puts back on track the agreements that would have the three men plead guilty to one of the deadliest attacks on the US in exchange for being spared the possibility of the death penalty. The attacks by al-Qaida killed nearly 3,000 people on 11 September, 2001, and helped spur US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in what the George W Bush administration called its war on terror.

The military appeals court released its ruling Monday night, according to the US official.

Military prosecutors and defense attorneys for Mohammed, the accused mastermind of the attacks, and two co-defendants reached the plea agreements after two years of government-approved negotiations. Within days of news of the plea deal this summer, Austin issued a brief order saying he was nullifying them. Defence lawyers said Austin had no legal authority to reject a decision already approved by the Guantanamo court's top authority and said the move amounted to unlawful interference in the case.

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

Austin now can take his effort to throw out the plea deals to the US Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. *—PTI*

NEW YEAR CELEBRATIONS

Fireworks explode over the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge during New Year's Eve celebrations in Sydney

Fireworks explode at the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, during the New Year's Eve celebration in Dubai, United Arab Emirates

A couple kiss after the ball drops in New York's Times Square, during the New Year's celebration

Syrians celebrate the New Year after the ousting of Assad regime, in Damascus, Syria

Israeli strikes kill 12 Palestinians in Gaza Strip

DEIR AL-BALAH, 1 JAN

Israeli strikes killed at least 12 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, mostly women and children, officials said Wednesday, as the nearly 15-month war ground on into the new year with no end in sight.

One strike hit a home in the Jabaliya area of northern Gaza, the most isolated and heavily destroyed part of the territory, where Israel has been waging a major operation since early October.

Gaza's Health Ministry says seven people were killed, including a woman and four children, and that at least a dozen other people were wounded.

Another strike overnight into Wednesday in the built-up Bureij refugee camp in central Gaza killed a woman and a child, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, which received the bodies.

In another development, Israel's Minister of Defense announced the imposition of economic sanctions against an operation to raise funds for Hezbollah terrorists who were wounded in September's Operation Grim Beepers, in which dozens of Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon were killed when their pagers exploded.

The pagers had been booby-trapped by Israeli agents.

The campaign has raised tens of thousands of dollars so far. This funding was used to strengthen the organisation's activists and restore its operational capabilities.

"The imposition of sanctions constitutes another significant step in the economic struggle against Hezbollah and other terrorist organisations, with the aim of discouraging the public from participating in financing their activities," said Israel's Money Laundering and Terror Financing Prohibition Authority. *—Agencies*

Ukraine halts transit of Russian gas to Europe

KYIV, 1 JAN

Ukraine on Wednesday halted Russian gas supplies to European customers that pass through the country, almost three years into Moscow's all-out invasion of its neighbour, after a prewar transit deal expired.

Ukraine's energy minister, Herman Halushchenko said, "This is a historic event. Russia is losing markets and will incur financial losses. Europe has already decided to phase out Russian gas, and (this) aligns with what Ukraine has done today," Halushchenko said in an update on the Telegram messaging app.

Russia's Gazprom said in a statement on Wednesday morning that it had been "deprived of the technical and legal ability to supply gas for transit through Ukraine," due to Ukraine's refusal to extend the deal.

Even as Russian troops and tanks moved into Ukraine, Russian natural gas kept flowing through the country's pipeline network — set up when Ukraine and Russia were both part of the Soviet Union — to Europe, under a five-year agreement that ran through the end of last year. Gazprom earned money from the gas and Ukraine collected transit fees.

Gazprom said that it had been deprived of the technical and legal ability to supply gas for transit through Ukraine *PHOTO: DWNEWS*

Before the war, Russia supplied nearly 40 per cent of the European Union's pipeline natural gas. Gas flowed through four pipeline systems, one under the Baltic Sea, one through Belarus and Poland, one through Ukraine and one under the Black Sea through Turkey to Bulgaria.

The Ukrainian transit route served Austria and Slovakia, which long got the bulk of their natural gas from Russia but have recently scrambled to diversify supplies. Gazprom halted supplies to Austria's OMV in mid-November over a contractual dispute.

Slovakia this year inked deals to begin buying natural gas from Azerbaijan, and also to import US liquefied natural gas through a pipeline from Poland. *—PTI*

Awami League may contest polls: B'desh

DHAKA, 1 JAN

Bangladesh's Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) AMM Nasir Uddin has said that ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League may participate in elections unless the government or the judiciary issues a ban against the party.

Uddin also assured that the Election Commission runs with complete independence and faces no external pressure.

"We are committed to taking all necessary steps to ensure a fair and transparent election," he added.

The CEC also acknowledged the issue of fake voters in previous elections and attributed a decline in voter registration to mistrust in the voting process. He announced plans to initiate a voter list update soon to address these concerns.

"The voter list will be updated within the next six months. This time, elections will not follow previous patterns. Since 5 August, there has been significant progress in fostering national consensus on electoral matters," he added.

During the meeting, the CEC Uddin provided detailed guidelines on voter list updates and preparations for the upcoming national election.

"Broadly speaking, the election can be scheduled between the end of 2025 and the first half of 2026," he said. *—PTI*

Yoon to be arrested by Monday: Official

SEOUL, 1 JAN

The head of South Korea's Corruption Investigation Office for High-ranking Officials Oh Dong-woon on Wednesday said impeached President Yoon Suk Yeol will be arrested by Monday, following an arrest warrant, reported Al Jazeera.

Oh Dong-woon warned that any attempts to obstruct the arrest, including barricades or locked gates, would be seen as interference with official duties. A Seoul court approved a warrant to detain Yoon, who was impeached on 3 December by the National Assembly over his failed attempt to impose martial law. *—ANI*

Yoon Suk Yeol *PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA*

MEMORIAL SERVICE

Families of S Korean plane crash victims visit site

SEOUL, 1 JAN

Grieving relatives of people killed in a plane crash in South Korea visited the site to pay respects to their loved ones on New Year's Day on Wednesday, as officials said they have identified all 179 bodies.

Only two of the 181 people aboard the Boeing 737-800 operated by Jeju Air survived when it crashed in Muan International Airport in southern South Korea on Sunday.

The bereaved families visited the site on Wednesday for the first time since the crash for a traditional memorial service. They were bused to the site, where they took turns laying white flowers, knelt down and bowed deeply before a memorial table where food was placed. The food included "ddeokguk," a Korean rice cake soup eaten on New Year's Day.

Experts from the US and Boeing representatives investigate the site of a plane crash at Muan International Airport in Muan *PHOTO: PTI*

Some wailed and dropped to the ground.

The Transport Ministry said authorities have completed the identification of the dead, which was complicated by the severe damage some bodies received. It said the government has so far handed over 11 bodies to relatives.

Investigators say the pilot received a warning from air traffic controllers of possible bird strikes and the plane issued a distress signal before the crash. Officials have said they will also look into whether the airport's localizer should have been constructed with lighter materials that would break more easily upon impact. The government announced that it will send the flight data recorder from the crashed Jeju Air plane to the US for further analysis, according to a report by Yonhap News Agency. *—PTI*

Corruption spreading like cancer through SL, says Prez

COLOMBO, 1 JAN

Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said on Wednesday that corruption has become a cancer spreading throughout the country and eliminating it requires a tremendous collective effort.

He made the remarks at an event held at the Presidential Secretariat to inaugurate the "Clean Sri Lanka" program.

"Our country has been plagued by widespread corruption, malpractice, and inefficiency within the state apparatus, political institutions, and society as a whole. Corruption has become a malignant cancer spreading throughout our nation, and eliminating it requires a tremendous collective effort," he said.

Dissanayake also called on the law enforcement agencies to perform "their duties with the necessary diligence and support."

"We believe these institutions will act with the dedication required to achieve this transformation. As political leaders, we are committed to setting an example through both our words and actions," he said.

"In 2023 alone, 181 people lost their lives in human-elephant conflicts, and 484 elephants were killed by human action. Although we possess an aesthetically and ecologically rich environment, we are a nation where 484 elephants die annually. Furthermore, floods and landslides displace significant populations; resulting in loss of life, and cause substantial economic damage," he said. Outlining the objectives of the "Clean Sri Lanka" project, he said it goes beyond merely cleaning up the environment. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gold begins New Year on a high, climbs ₹440

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

Gold prices spurted by Rs 440 to Rs 79,390 per 10 grams on Wednesday driven by fresh buying by stockists, beginning the New Year on a strong note. The precious metal had traded at Rs 78,950 per 10 grams on Tuesday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated Rs 440 to Rs 78,840 per 10 grams. The metal had ended at Rs 78,400 per 10 grams in the previous trading session. Silver also regained its sheen by jumping Rs 800 to Rs 90,500 per kg on Wednesday. The white metal finished at Rs 89,700 per kg in the previous session In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for February delivery close flat at Rs 76,893 per 10 grams on Wednesday. Silver contracts for March delivery slipped Rs 28 or 0.03 per cent to settle at Rs 87,550 per kg in the futures trade on the commodities bourse.—*PTI*

Rupee ends flat at 85.64 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

The rupee settled flat at 85.64 against the US dollar in the first session of 2025 on Wednesday, as gains from positive domestic equities were offset by unabated foreign fund outflows. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 85.63 and touched an intraday low of 85.72 against the greenback during the session. The unit ended the session at 85.64 against the dollar, unchanged from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee depreciated 12 paise to close at a fresh all-time closing low of 85.64 against the US dollar. On 27 December, the local currency touched its lifetime intraday low of 85.80 against the greenback. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, stood at 108.48.. —*PTI*

E-com to challenge Amazon, Flipkart by 2025: Zepto CEO

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

The quick commerce industry will reach a stage in 2025 where it will be comparable to traditional e-commerce giants like Amazon and Flipkart, Zepto co-founder and CEO Aadit Palicha has asserted. In a LinkedIn post on New Year's Eve, he said Zepto last year announced that 2024 will be the year people realise that quick commerce has the potential to create an Amazon/Flipkart level outcome in India and outlined three key forecasts for the new year. IPO-headed Zepto reported a 120 per cent increase in operating revenue to Rs 4,454 crore in FY24, surpassing competitors like Swiggy's Instamart and Zomato's Blinkit. Emphasising that success in quick commerce will hinge on "exceptional execution", Palicha said it will be challenging for every single player to deliver. —*PTI*

Hero MotoCorp gets additional tax demand of ₹26.4 cr

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Two-wheeler maker Hero MotoCorp Ltd on Wednesday said it has received an additional tax demand of Rs 26.40 crore from the Income Tax Department for the assessment year 2020-21. The company received an order dated 31 December, 2024, from the Deputy Commissioner of Income Tax, Central Circle 27, New Delhi for the assessment year 2020-21, Hero MotoCorp Ltd said in a regulatory filing. Hero MotoCorp said it is examining the order and would take appropriate steps, including filing of appeal and rectification application —*PTI*

Commercial LPG cheaper by ₹14.5, ATF cut by ₹1,401

Rate cut follows after 2 rounds of monthly increases since Nov

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

The price of Jet fuel, or ATF, on Wednesday was reduced by 1.5 per cent and rates of commercial LPG that is used in hotels and restaurants was cut by Rs 14.5 per 19-kg cylinder in the monthly revision done in line with benchmark international prices.

The aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was reduced by Rs 1,401.37 per kilolitre, or 1.52 per cent, to Rs 90,455.47 per kl in the national capital - home to one of the busiest airports in the country, according to state-owned fuel retailers.

The rate cut follows two rounds of monthly increases. Prices were increased by Rs 2,941.5 per kl (3.3 per cent) on 1 November, and by Rs 1,318.12 per kl (1.45 per cent) on 1 December, 2024.

The ATF price in Mumbai has been reduced to Rs 84,511.93 on Wednesday, from Rs 85,861.02 per kl previously. Oil firms also reduced the price of commercial LPG by Rs 14.5 to Rs 1,804 per 19-kg cylinder in the national capital.

In five price increases, commercial LPG rates had been hiked by Rs 172.5 per 19-kg cylinder PHOTO: PTI

In five price increases, commercial LPG rates had been hiked by Rs 172.5 per 19-kg cylinder.

Commercial LPG now costs Rs 1,756 per 19-kg cylinder in Mumbai, Rs 1,911 in Kolkata and Rs 1,966 in Chennai.

Prices of ATF and LPG differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes including VAT.

The rate of cooking gas used in domestic households, however, remained unchanged at Rs 803 per 14.2-kg cylinder.

State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) revise prices of ATF and cooking gas on the first of every month based on the average price of benchmark international fuel and foreign exchange rate. —*PTI*

₹ 24.61 CR CONVERSION

Viacom18 Media becomes direct subsidiary of RIL

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Viacom18 Media, a leading media and entertainment company, has become a direct subsidiary of Reliance Industries following the conversion of over 24.61 crore compulsorily convertible preference shares (CCPS) into an equivalent number of equity shares.

Earlier, Viacom18Media was a material subsidiary of Network18 Media & Investments Ltd, a subsidiary of Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL).

On 30 December, billionaire Mukesh Ambani-led RIL converted 24,61,33,682 CCPS into the equivalent of a share, following approval granted by the shareholders of Network18.

Earlier, RIL was holding a 70.49 per cent stake in Viacom18 Media on a fully diluted basis.

PHOTO: X

"This comprised 5,57,27,821 equity shares and 24,61,33,682 CCPS. Viacom18 was a material subsidiary of Network18 Media & Investments Limited ('Network18')," it said.

Following this conversion, Network18 ceases to exercise control over Viacom18, said RIL.

In March 2024, RIL had acquired Paramount Global's 13.01 per cent stake in Viacom18 for Rs 4,286 crore. After this, RIL's holding in Viacom18 had increased to 70.49 per cent. —*PTI*

BUYING IN BLUE-CHIPS

Mkts rebound in 1st session of 2025; Sensex up by 368 pts

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

Benchmark Sensex and Nifty started the New Year on a high note with the key indices closing higher in a see-saw trade on Wednesday on buying in blue-chip stocks.

Snapping its two-day falling streak, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 368.40 points or 0.47 per cent to settle at 78,507.41 on the first trading session of 2025. During the day, it surged 617.48 points or 0.79 per cent to 78,756.49.

The NSE Nifty climbed 98.10 points or 0.41 per cent to 23,742.90.

Among Sensex shares, Maruti, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Tata Motors, IndusInd Bank, Asian Paints, Power Grid, HDFC Bank and Axis Bank advanced.

Tata Steel, Adani Ports, Zomato, HCL Tech, State Bank of India, Hindustan Unilever and Tech Mahindra were among the laggards.

Nifty climbs 98.10 points or 0.41 per cent to 23,742.90 PHOTO: PTI

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 4,645.22 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

Most of the Asian and European markets were closed for New Year holidays.

US markets ended lower on Tuesday.Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.88 per cent to USD 74.64 a barrel.

The BSE benchmark Sensex declined 109.12 points or 0.14 per cent to settle at 78,139.01 on Tuesday. The Nifty dipped marginally by 0.10 points to settle at 23,644.80.

In the entire 2024, the Sensex jumped 5,898.75 points or 8.16 per cent, and the Nifty surged 1,913.4 points or 8.80 per cent. —*PTI*

TN govt cancels smart meter tender deal with Adani Energy

CHENNAI, 1 JAN

Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation has cancelled a global tender floated for procuring smart meters, citing the high cost quoted by Adani Energy Solutions Ltd (AESL). The tenders were floated as four packages in August 2023 for providing the smart meters under the central government's revamped distribution sector scheme. AESL, a BSE-listed firm was the lowest bidder for package 1 of the tender covering eight districts, including Chennai, and involved installation of over 82 lakh smart meters, a source said. The tender was cancelled on 27 December, 2024, as the cost quoted by AESL was reportedly higher. A re-tender is likely to be floated. Tenders for three other packages were also cancelled, he said without divulging further details. The government's move comes in the wake of the controversy surrounding industrialist Gautam Adani, promoter of the Adani Group over allegations of being part of a scheme to pay over USD 250 million (about Rs 2,100 crore) bribe to Indian officials in exchange of favourable terms for solar power contracts. US prosecutors had indicted Adani and some others in connection with the matter. Meanwhile, Power Mech Projects on Wednesday said it has secured an order worth Rs 294 crore from Adani Power.

PHOTO: PTI

The order is for providing various services to the 1,320 MW Korba Phase-II Thermal Power Project in Chhattisgarh. —*PTI*

UltraTech appoints new CEO, CFO for India Cements

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

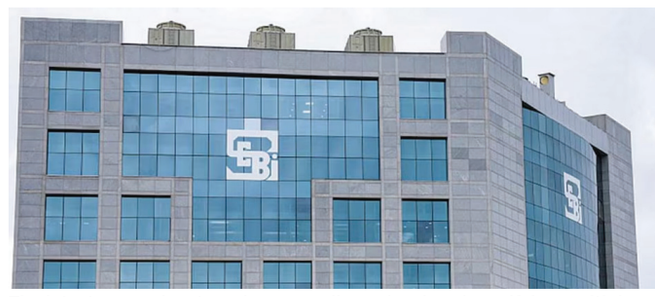
India Cements Ltd, now a subsidiary of UltraTech, has announced the appointment of new leadership for the company, following the exit of its former promoters including N Srinivasan as Managing Director & CEO from the South-based cement maker.

The board of India Cements Ltd (ICL) has approved the appointment of Suresh Vasant Patil as CEO and Krishnagopal Ladsaria as CFO, the company said in a regulatory filing. Both the appointments are with effect from Wednesday, it added.

Patil, who joined the Aditya Birla conglomerate as a Management Trainee in 1988, has over 35 years of work experience. Currently, he heads the Ready-Mix Concrete and Building Product Division at UltraTech.

While Ladsaria, in his immediate previous role, was the chief financial officer at Century Enka, a listed Aditya Birla conglomerate Company.

A day after, ICL informed that pursuant to the completion of transaction and due to the consequent cessation of control by existing promoters over company, N Srinivasan has stepped down as Vice Chairman and Managing Director & CEO. —*PTI*



The latest move aims to reduce compliance burdens by unifying multiple periodic filing requirements into a single system PHOTO: PTI

SEBI mandates simplified compliance for listed entities

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Capital markets regulator SEBI has rolled out a new compliance framework for listed entities, introducing integrated filing for governance and financial disclosures, which will be applicable for filings to be done for the quarter ending 31 December, 2024.

The latest move aims to reduce compliance burdens by unifying multiple periodic filing requirements into a single system. The regulator incorporates recommendations from an expert committee which was set up to review the SEBI's LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) norms.

Under the new system, governance-related filings such as statements on investor grievance redressal and corporate governance compliance must now be submitted within 30 days of the quarter's end.

Financial filings, including disclosures of related-party transactions and quarterly financial results, have a 45-day deadline, with an extended 60-day timeline for year-end submissions, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) said in a circular on Tuesday.

SEBI also mandated quarterly disclosure of specific material events, including tax litigation updates, minor penalties, and acquisitions exceeding defined thresholds. These are to be incorporated into the integrated filing format, streamlining previously fragmented reporting practices.

Further, restrictions have been imposed on auditors rendering certain services, such as internal audits and compliance management, to maintain impartiality —*PTI*

MAHINDRA: INDIA READY TO THRIVE ON ITS OWN

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

India can enhance its economic potential and become a keystone in the global supply chain system by seizing the opportunity from the shift in global alliances, Mahindra Group Chairman Anand Mahindra said and asserted that "India is well positioned to more than fend for itself".

In his New Year message to the employees of the group, Mahindra said international relations could become more and more transactional, driven strongly by national interest and muscle-flexing.

Noting that a New Year is traditionally a time for hope and optimism, referring to the Cambridge Dictionary choosing "Manifest" as the word of the year, Mahindra said, 'Manifest' not in its traditional meaning of "to show or demonstrate" but in its current, connotation of visualising aspirations and bringing them into reality. —*PTI*

RBI to sell ₹4.73L crore bonds this quarter

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

Reserve Bank of India will sell government bond worth Rs 4.73 lakh crore in January–March quarter of 2025 on State Governments and Union territories.

The RBI informed that the actual amount of borrowings and the details of the States/UTs participating would be intimated by way of press releases two or three days before the actual auction day and would depend on the requirement of the State Governments/UTs approval from the Government of India under Article 293(3) of the Constitution of India and the market conditions.

"RBI would endeavour to conduct the auctions in a non-disruptive manner and distribute the borrowings evenly throughout the quarter," the RBI added.

The RBI said it reserved the right to modify the dates and the amount of auction in consultation with State Governments/UTs.

It acknowledges the Government's debt obligation. Such securities are short term (usually called treasury bills, with original maturities of less than one year) or long term (usually called Government bonds or dated securities with original maturity of one year or more).

In India, the Central Government issues both, treasury bills and bonds or dated securities while the State Governments issue only bonds or dated securities, which are called the State Development Loans (SDLs) —*ANI*

EaseMyTrip CEO resigns, brother Rikant to take over

NEW DELHI, 1 JAN

Online travel tech aggregator EaseMyTrip on Wednesday said its Co-Founder and CEO Nishant Pitti has resigned on account of "personal reasons".

His brother and Co-Founder Rikant Pittie, who is currently the company's Executive Director, has been appointed as the new CEO.

"In his new role, Rikant will lead the company's strategic initiatives, drive innovation, and enhance customer experiences to further strengthen EaseMyTrip's position in the industry," the company stated in a regulatory filing.

Nishant Pitti

A graduate from Kurukshetra University, Ambala, Pittie co-founded the company in 2008. He holds about 16 years of experience in tourism, travel, HR, and technology.

In his new role, he will lead the company's strategic initiatives, drive innovation, and enhance customer experiences to strengthen Ease My Trip's position in the industry, the filing said. Shares of Ease My Trip were trading at Rs 15.85 apiece on the BSE on Wednesday, 0.13 per cent lower than the previous close. —*PTI*

CONNECTIVITY ABOVE 10K FEET

AI is first to roll out Wi-Fi on select fleet

MUMBAI, 1 JAN

Private carrier Air India on Wednesday rolled out Wi-Fi internet connectivity services on board domestic and international flights on its widebody Airbus A350 and Boeing 787-9 fleet as well as on select Airbus A321neo aircraft.

This makes Air India the first airline to offer such services on flights within India, the airline said.

Accessible on Wi-Fi-enabled devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones with iOS or Android operating systems, the in-flight Wi-Fi will also allow guests to connect multiple devices simultaneously when above 10,000 feet, it said.

The in-flight Wi-Fi will also allow guests to connect multiple devices simultaneously when above 10,000 feet PHOTO: PTI

The deployment of Wi-Fi on domestic routes follows an ongoing pilot programme on international services operated by the Airbus A350, select Airbus A321 neo and Boeing B787-9 aircraft serving international destinations including New York, London, Paris and Singapore. As with the domestic offer, Wi-Fi is complimentary for an introductory period, Air India said.

Air India said it will progressively roll out the service on other aircraft in its fleet over time.

Meanwhile, Air India has covered a lot of ground since privatisation and its global coverage will further increase in the years ahead, the airline's chief Campbell Wilson said on Wednesday.

He also said the interior refit of the single-aisle fleet, serving domestic and short-haul international destinations, is underway, and will be completed by mid-2025 —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Vinod Kambli walks out of hospital

THANE, 1 JAN

Former India batsman Vinod Kambli was discharged from a private hospital at Bhiwandi in Thane district on Wednesday afternoon after undergoing treatment for nearly two weeks. He walked out of the hospital around 4 pm. 52-year-old Kambli was initially admitted to Akruti Hospital for urinary infection and cramps, but the doctors later said that clots were found in his brain. In a New Year's message, Kambli, talking to the waiting media, made an appeal to the people to shun alcohol and narcotic drugs, saying that vices can destroy one's life. He would soon be back on the field, the former swashbuckling batsman said. Kambli was now "completely fit" though he will have to take certain precautions, said Dr Vivek Trivedi who treated him. *—PTI*

Wimbledon finalist Gabriela reveals her cancer battle

LONDON, 1 JAN

Former US Open women's doubles champion Gabriela Dabrowski revealed on Tuesday she had played through 2024 after undergoing treatment for breast cancer. She delayed part of that treatment so she could compete at Wimbledon where she reached the doubles final. "I know this will come as a shock to many, but I am OK and I will be OK," the 32-year-old Canadian said on social media. "Early detection saves lives. I can wholeheartedly agree with this." Dabrowski, ranked third in women's doubles, said in an Instagram post that she received the diagnosis in April. She did not play that month and in May because of surgery. *—PTI*

Spanish League bars Barcelona from adding Olmo

BARCELONA, 1 JAN

Spanish league said Tuesday that Barcelona has failed to meet Financial Fair Play rules in the latest blow to the club's hopes of keeping playmaker Dani Olmo. The league said Barcelona "did not present any alternative" on adhering to the regulations, which was required for the club to "register any player beginning on 2 January." Barcelona needed to have another financial lever approved by the league in order to register Olmo after a judge ruled against the club on Monday in the second consecutive court setback ahead of the end-of-year deadline. Barcelona had reportedly reached a deal to sell VIP seats at the renovated Camp Nou stadium for 100 million euros ($104 million). That would reportedly be enough for the club to add Olmo and forward Pau Víctor to the squad. Barcelona has endured difficulties registering some players recently because of its financial struggles. *—PTI*

Yuva Kabaddi series: UP to face Chandigarh in final

COIMBATORE, 1 JAN

Division 2 stage of the 11th Yuva Kabaddi Series is heading toward an exciting conclusion as UP Falcons solidified their position at the top and secured a spot in the final against Chandigarh Chargers, according to a release from the Yuva Kabaddi Series. The opening match saw UP Falcons defeat Delhi Dhurandhars 48-38 in a high-scoring encounter. This victory not only propelled the Falcons to the top of the table but also confirmed their place in the final. In the final match of the day, Vizag Victors registered a strong 48-34 win over Hyderabad Hurricanes. Pirati Srisivatejesh and Gali Lakshma Reddy were the stars for Vizag, both scoring 11 raid points, while Pavan Gopineedi shone in defence with a High 5. *—ANI*

Gambhir's handling of India's transition raises eyebrows

Gambhir threatens exit for players not following his plan

SYDNEY, 1 JAN

As Indian cricket deals with the fading form of its two stalwarts in captain Rohit Sharma and senior batter Virat Kohli, head coach Gautam Gambhir and his support staff's role in handling a team in transition has also come into focus.

The ongoing Border-Gavaskar Trophy has been a difficult ride for the side has struggled to get the right combination in the face of an aggressive and highly-driven Australian team. The visitors will be playing the must-win fifth and final Test here from Friday.

The on-field roller-coaster is causing some off-field issues as well with murmurs of unrest in the dressing room beginning to grow.

The India head coach is reportedly annoyed with the way certain players conducted themselves on the ground. Gambhir is said to have told the players that he gave them 6 months to play 'their way' but it all stops now. From now onwards those who don't play according to the plans set by him for the team, will be shown the exit door.

India's Head Coach Gautam Gambhir PHOTO: X

There are players in the team, who are feeling insecure because of his proclivity to experiment with the playing eleven. In the ongoing BGT, a punt like Nitish Reddy has worked out brilliantly but the handling of Shubman Gill is still being debated.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah has now been elevated to the ICC chief's position and the Board will have his full-time successor only after 12 January. Once that administrative stability is in place, the BCCI brass will have some thinking to do.

"He was never BCCI's first choice (it was VVS Laxman) and some of the well-known overseas names didn't want to coach all three formats, so he was a compromise. Obviously, some other compulsions were also there," the official said. *—PTI*

'BGT would've been one-sided without Bumrah'

SYDNEY, 1 JAN

Jasprit Bumrah's incredible performance has prevented the Border-Gavaskar series from becoming completely lopsided in Australia's favour, said pace great Glenn McGrath, lauding the India spearhead for his ball-control and ability to adapt quickly.

India trail 1-2 in the five-match series that will conclude with the game here starting Friday.

Bumrah has been the visiting side's standout performer with 30 wickets so far at a jaw-dropping average of less than 20. India's batting, however, has been poor and lacked planning.

"He has been a massive part of the Indian team and without him, the series might have been more one-sided and what he does is special," McGrath told media-people. *—PTI*

LATEST ICC RANKINGS

Bumrah eclipses stalwart Ashwin's rating-point record

DUBAI, 1 JAN

India's pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Wednesday bettered spin stalwart Ravichandran Ashwin's all-time rating-point record by an Indian in the latest ICC rankings when he touched the 907-point mark.

Ashwin's highest rating was 904, achieved in December 2016.

The 907 ranking points also placed Bumrah as joint-17th in the all-time list with Derek Underwood of England.

Ahead of the Boxing Day Test in Melbourne last week, Bumrah had equalled the record (904) held by Ashwin in the ranking for bowlers.

However, another superb performance at the MCG, where he got nine wickets, albeit in a losing cause, helped him consolidate his lead as the No. 1 Test bowler in the recent update.

Australia skipper Pat Cummins earned 15 rating points following his six wickets at MCG to jump a place to No. 3.

He also secured a third place in the Test all-rounder rankings after he notched up 90 vital runs across two innings during Australia's 184-run win in the fourth Test.

Opener Yashasvi Jaiswal's 82-run first-innings knock in the Boxing Day Test saw him jump a spot to a career-best fourth with 854 rating points, while Nitish Kumar Reddy's maiden Test century leapfrogged him 20 places to 53rd in the Test batting rankings. *—PTI*

Djokovic & Kyrgios lose in doubles at Brisbane Int'l

BRISBANE, 1 JAN

The new doubles team of Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios are out of the Brisbane International in the second round.

The pair, granted a wild-card entry by tournament organizers, lost 6-2, 3-6, 10-8 Wednesday to the top-seeded team of Nikola Mektic of Croatia and New Zealander Michael Venus.

A Djokovic double-fault with the duo leading 8-6 in the match tiebreak was key to the defeat as they lost the last four points of the match.

"Incredible," Mektic told the sold-out crowd. "I was very happy when I saw them, I could play them on the first of January. It's an amazing feeling to start the year like this and we knew there would be points like that against players like this."

Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios PHOTO: X

DJokovic and Kyrgios won their opening doubles match, a crowd-pleasing, fist-pumping affair by both players at Pat Rafter Arena.

Kyrgios lost his opening singles match on Tuesday after an 18-month absence from the tour due to injuries. Djokovic won his first singles match on the same day and will next play Gael Monfils. *—PTI*

Osaka enters WTA Auckland QFs

AUCKLAND, 1 JAN

Four-time Grand Slam singles winner Naomi Osaka has started 2025 in style, beating Julia Grabher 7–5, 6–3 on Wednesday to reach the quarterfinals of the Auckland tennis classic.

Osaka overcame a swirling breeze and a lengthy rain break to progress comfortably beyond the second round. Although the wind often affected her ball toss, Osaka didn't drop her serve at any stage and broke Grabher once in each set to win her way to the Auckland quarterfinals for the second time. Osaka also reached the last eight on her previous visit to New Zealand in 2017.

Naomi Osaka, four-time Grand Slam singles winner PHOTO: X

"She was a really tough opponent for me to play against and I felt I just had to concentrate on myself a lot and try not to be as nervous as I felt," Osaka said.

"I got some great advice from a great coach over there," Osaka added, referring to Patrick Mouratoglou who recently joined her team and previously had a long association with Serena Williams. "I just tried to focus on my bullet points and go out swinging if I had to go out. But fortunately I'm here to play another round."

Osaka again showed no sign of the back injury which ended her 2024 season at the China Open in October. Auckland tournament is a tune-up for the Australian Open, which begins 12 January. *—PTI*

Amorim 'excited' about where Man U can go in 2025

MANCHESTER, 1 JAN

Despite his team entering 2025 in 14th place in the Premier League, Manchester United head coach Ruben Amorim is "very excited" about the year ahead.

United's 2-0 home defeat to Newcastle on Monday saw it suffer five league losses in the same calendar month for the first time since September 1962, and a fourth straight reverse in all competitions means the Red Devils have lost six of their last eight.

But in a message posted on his club's official X account on New Year's Eve, Amorim wrote: "I know it will take a lot of hard work from everyone to get there, but I am very excited about where we can go together in 2025."

Amorim is yet to halt the alarming slide which led to Erik ten Hag's dismissal in October, and his team is seven points above the drop zone with increasing talk of a relegation fight, including by Amorim himself who has called it "a possibility."

Ruben Amorim PHOTO: X

But the Portuguese says he's determined to press on with the 3-4-3 system despite the difficulties United's squad has had in adapting.

United has the toughest of starts to 2025 when it travels to play league leader Liverpool on Sunday in what is widely considered English soccer's fiercest rivalry. *—PTI*

Kazakhstan in UC semis, Poland enter final 8

- In Sydney, Iga Swiatek and Hubert Hurcacz won their deciding mixed doubles match over the Czech Republic to qualify Poland for the quarterfinals

PERTH, 1 JAN

Kazakhstan has advanced to the United Cup mixed teams tennis tournament semifinals with a 2–1 win over a German team playing without the injured world No. 2-ranked Alexander Zverev.

"Alexander Zverev has withdrawn from the United Cup due to a bicep strain," organizers said. "Daniel Masur will take his place for Team Germany in today's singles match against Kazakhstan."

Zverev was a late scratch for Germany on Wednesday due to a biceps injury. He was scheduled to face Alexander Shevchenko but withdrew at the last minute with Kazakhstan leading the tie 1–0 after Elena Rybakina beat Laura Siegemund 6–3, 6–1.

World No 2-ranked Alexander Zverev PHOTO: PTI

Shevchenko beat Zverev's replacement, Daniel Masur, 6–7 (5), 6–2, 6–2 to clinch the tie for Kazakhstan while Zverev watched from the sidelines. Germany won the later mixed doubles.

In Sydney, Iga Swiatek and Hubert Hurcacz won their deciding mixed doubles match over the Czech Republic to qualify Poland for the quarterfinals.

World No. 2 Swiatek and Hurcacz beat Tomáš Macháč and Karolína Muchová 7–6 (3), 6–3 in the decider at Sydney's Ken Rosewall Arena. The Polish team led 5–2 before allowing the Czechs back into the first set.

In earlier singles, Macháč gave the Czech Republic the lead with a 7–5, 3–6, 6–4 win over Hurcacz before Swiatek evened the tie with a 6–3, 6–4 win over Muchová. *—PTI*

INDIA SIGN OFF ON A HIGH

Vaishali bags bronze at women's Blitz

NEW YORK, 1 JAN

India's R Vaishali clinched a bronze in the women's section of the World Blitz Championship, capping another strong performance by the country's chess players after stalwart Koneru Humpy's title-winning show in the rapid event here.

Vaishali defeated China's Zhu Jiner 2.5–1.5 in the quarter-finals before losing to another Chinese opponent Ju Wenjun 0.5–2.5 in the semi-final.

In an event completely dominated by the Chinese, Ju Wenjun went on to snare the world title defeating compatriot Lei Tingjie 3.5–2.5.

Five-time world champion and International Chess Federation (FIDE) vice president Viswanathan Anand congratulated Vaishali for her efforts, saying it was a great way to end the year.

Vaishali defeated China's Zhu Jiner 2.5–1.5 in the quarter-finals before losing to another Chinese opponent Ju Wenjun PHOTO: X

"Congratulations to Vaishali for taking bronze. Her qualification was truly a power packed performance. Our Waca Chess mentee (WestBridge Anand Chess Academy) has done us proud," Anand wrote on X.

"We are so happy to be supporting her and her chess. What a way to wrap up 2024. In 2021, we thought we would get stronger chess players but here we have it a World Champion (Humpy) and a Bronze medallist, " he wrote.

In the Open section, world number one Magnus Carlsen and Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi shared the Blitz title after three sudden-death games failed to produce a winner. This was first time that the title was awarded to two players after Carlsen asked whether it could be shared given the deadlock.

"We reached a point where it had been a long day. We played many games, we had three draws and I felt that I could keep playing. But it was a nice solution to share the win, it was a good way to end it," Carlsen said. *—PTI*

'Champions Trophy revival possible if calendar allows'

ROURKELA, 1 JAN

FIH President Dato Tayyab Ikram on Wednesday expressed his willingness to revive the prestigious Champions Trophy before highlighting the difficulty in scheduling the event on an already crowded international hockey calendar.

The Champions Trophy, which began as an annual event in 1978 and transitioned to a biennial format in 2014, was once regarded as one of hockey's most esteemed tournaments, only behind the World Cup and the Olympics.

Its last edition was held in 2018 before the international federation discontinued the event.

"We are not ruling out that the Champions Trophy or a similar event might be reintroduced. But we need to look at the space (in the calendar)," Ikram said during a press conference.

He highlighted the demanding schedule of modern athletes and the importance of introducing "better and more exciting events" while considering their workload.

He also stressed the need to expand hockey's global reach and provide opportunities for nations beyond the top nine teams.

He underscored the significance of bridging the gap between elite and emerging hockey nations while acknowledging the challenges of an increasingly crowded calendar.

Speaking about the federation's flagship tournament, the Pro League, which has been ongoing since 2019, Ikram announced the launch of a new project called "Pro League Connect," aimed at involving countries outside the top hockey nations. *—PTI*